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FROM THE WEST TO THE WEST



ABIGAIL SCOTT DUNNWAY

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FROM THE WEST TO THE WEST.

Yours for Liberty
Herbert A. Deane

This One



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*JEAN beheld a tall, sun-
burned young man.—Page 185*

FROM THE WEST TO THE WEST

**Across the Plains to
Oregon**

BY
ABIGAIL SCOTT DUNIWAY

With Frontispiece in Color



CHICAGO
A. C. McCLURG & CO.
1905

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1905

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To
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF OREGON
AND HER RISEN AND REMAINING PIONEERS
I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE
THIS BOOK
ABIGAIL SCOTT DUNIWAY

PREFACE

NOT from any desire for augmented fame, or for further notoriety than has long been mine (at least within the chosen bailiwick of my farthest and best beloved West), have I consented to indite these pages.

The events of pioneer life, which form the groundwork of this story, are woven into a composite whole by memory and imagination. But they are not personal, nor do they present the reader, except in a fragmentary and romantic sense, with the actual, individual lives of borderers I have known. The story, nevertheless, is true to life and border history; and, no matter what may be the fate of the book, the facts it delineates will never die.

Fifty years ago, as an illiterate, inexperienced settler, a busy, overworked child-mother and housewife, an impulse to write was born within me, inherited from my Scottish ancestry, which no lack of education or opportunity could allay. So I wrote a little book which I called "Captain Gray's Company, or Crossing the Plains and Living in Oregon."

Measured by time and distance as now computed, that was ages ago. The iron horse and the telegraph had not crossed the Mississippi; the telephone and the electric light were not; and there were no cables under the sea.

Life's twilight's shadows are around me now. The good husband who shaped my destiny in childhood has passed to the skies; my beloved, beautiful, and only daughter has also risen; my faithful sons have founded homes and

families of their own. Sitting alone in my deserted but not lonely home, I have yielded to a demand that for several years has been reaching me by person, post, and telephone, requesting the republication of my first little story, which passed rapidly through two editions, and for forty years has been out of print. In its stead I have written this historical novel.

Among the relics of the border times that abound in the rooms of the Oregon Historical Society may be seen an immigrant wagon, a battered ox-yoke, a clumsy, home-made hand-loom, an old-fashioned spinning-wheel, and a rusty Dutch oven. Such articles are valuable as relics, but they would not sell in paying quantities in this utilitarian age if duplicated and placed upon the market. Just so with "Captain Gray's Company." It accomplished its mission in its day and way. By its aid its struggling author stumbled forward to higher aims. Let it rest, and let the world go marching on.

A. S. D.

PORTLAND, OREGON,
January 15, 1905.

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FROM THE WEST TO THE WEST

FROM THE WEST TO THE WEST

I

A REMOVAL IS PLANNED

ON the front veranda of a rectangular farmhouse, somewhat pretentious for its time and place, stood a woman in expectant attitude. The bleak wind of a spent March day played rudely with the straying ends of her bright, abundant red-brown hair, which she brushed frequently from her careworn face as she peered through the thickening shadows of approaching night. The ice-laden branches of a leafless locust swept the latticed corner behind which she had retreated for protection from the wind. A great white-and-yellow watch-dog crouched expectantly at her feet, whining and wagging his tail.

Indoors, the big living-room echoed with the laughter and prattle of many voices. At one end of a long table, littered with books and slates and dimly lighted by flickering tallow dips, sat the older children of the household, busy with their lessons for the morrow's recitations. A big fire of maple logs roared on the hearth in harmony with the roaring of the wind outside.

"Yes, Rover, he's coming," exclaimed the watcher on the veranda, as the dog sprang to his feet with a noisy proclamation of welcome.

A shaggy-bearded horseman, muffled to the ears in a tawny fur coat, tossed his bridle to a stable-boy and, rushing up the icy steps, caught the gentle woman in his

arms. "It's all settled, mother. I've made terms with Lije. He's to take my farm and pay me as he can. I've made a liberal discount for the keep of the old folks; and we'll sell off the stock, the farming implements, the household stuff, and the sawmill, and be off in less than a month for the Territory of Oregon."

Mrs. Ranger shrank and shivered. "Oregon is a long way off, John," she said, nestling closer to his side and half suppressing a sob. "There's the danger and the hardships of the journey to be considered, you know."

"I will always protect you and the children under all circumstances, Annie. Can't you trust me?"

"Have n't I always trusted you, John? But —"

"What is it, Annie? Don't be afraid to speak your mind."

"I was thinking, dear, — you know we've always lived on the frontier, and civilization is just now beginning to catch up with us, — might n't it be better for us to stay here and enjoy it? Illinois is still a new country, you know. We've never had any advantages to speak of, and none of the children, nor I, have ever seen a railroad."

"Don't be foolish, Annie! We'll take civilization with us wherever we go, railroads or no railroads."

"But we'll be compelled to leave our parents behind, John. They're old and infirm now, and we'll be going so far away that we'll never see them again. At least, I sha'n't."

The husband cleared his throat, but did not reply. The wife continued her protest.

"Just think of the sorrow we'll bring upon 'em in their closing days, dear! Then there's that awful journey for us and the children through more than two thousand miles of unsettled country, among wild beasts and wilder Indians. Had n't we better let well-enough alone, and remain where we are comfortable?"

"A six months' journey across the untracked continent,

with ox teams and dead-ax wagons, won't be a summer picnic; I'll admit that. But the experience will come only one day at a time, and we can stand it. It will be like a whipping, — it will feel good when it is over and quits hurting."

"You are well and strong, John, but you know-I have never been like myself since that awful time when your brother Joe got into that trouble. It was at the time of Harry's birth, you know. You did n't mean to neglect me, dear, but you had to do it."

"There, there, little wife!" placing his hand over her mouth. "Let the dead past bury its dead. Never mention Joe to me again. And never fear for a minute that you and the children won't be taken care of."

"I beg your pardon, John!" and the wife shrank back against the lattice and shivered. The protruding thorn of a naked locust bough scratched her cheek, and the red blood trickled down.

"I need your encouragement, in this time of all times, Annie. You must n't fail me now," he said, speaking in an injured tone.

"Have I ever failed you yet, my husband?"

"I can't say that you have, Annie. But you worry too much; you bore a fellow so. Just brace up; don't anticipate trouble. It'll come soon enough without your meeting it half-way. You ought to consider the welfare of the children."

"Have I ever lived for myself, John?"

"No, no; but you fret too much. I suppose it's a woman's way, though, and I must stand it. There's the chance of a lifetime before us, Annie." He added after a pause, "The Oregon Donation Land Law that was passed by Congress nearly two years ago won't be a law always. United States Senators in the farthest East are already urging its repeal. We've barely time, even by going now, to get in on the ground-floor. Then we'll get, in our own right, to have and to hold, in fee simple,

as the lawyers say, a big square mile of the finest land that ever rolled out o' doors."

"Will there be no mortgage to eat us up with interest, and no malaria to shake us to pieces, John? And will you keep the woodpile away from the front gate, and make an out-of-the-way lane for the cows, so they won't come home at night through the front avenue?"

"There 'll be no mortgage and no malaria. One-half of the claim will belong to you absolutely; and you can order the improvements to suit yourself. Only think of it! A square mile o' land is six hundred and forty acres, and six hundred and forty acres is a whole square mile! We would n't be dealing justly by our children if we let the opportunity slip. We 'll get plenty o' land to make a good-sized farm for every child on the plantation, and it won't cost us a red cent to have and to hold it!"

"That was the plan our parents had in view when they came here from Kentucky, John. They wanted land for their children, you know. They wanted us all to settle close around 'em, and be the stay and comfort of their old age." And Mrs. Ranger laughed hysterically.

"You shiver, Annie. You ought n't to be out in this bleak March wind. Let's go inside."

"I'm not minding the wind, dear. I was thinking of the way people's plans so often miscarry. Children do their own thinking and planning nowadays, as they always did, regardless of what their parents wish. Look at us! We're planning to leave your parents and mine, for good and all, after they've worn themselves out in our service; and we need n't expect different treatment from our children when we get old and decrepit."

"But I've already arranged for our parents' keep with Lije and Mary," said the husband, petulantly. "Did n't I tell you so?"

"But suppose Lije fails in business; or suppose he gets the far Western fever too; or suppose he tires of his bargain and quits?"

A black cloud scudded away before the wind, uncovering the face of the moon. The silver light burst suddenly upon the pair.

"What's the matter, Annie?" cried the husband, in alarm. "Are you sick?" Her upturned face was like ashes.

"No; it's nothing. I was only thinking."

They entered the house together, their brains busy with unuttered thoughts. The baby of less than a year extended her chubby hands to her father, and the older babies clamored for recognition in roistering glee.

"Take my coat and hat, Hal; and get my slippers, somebody. Don't all jump at once! Gals, put down your books, and go to the kitchen and help your mother. Don't sit around like so many cash boarders! You ought n't to let your mother do a stroke of work at anything."

"You could n't help it unless you caged her, or bound her hand and foot," answered Jean, who strongly resembled her father in disposition, voice, and speech. But the command was obeyed; and the pale-faced mother, escorted from the kitchen amid much laughter by Mary, Marjorie, and Jean, was soon seated before the roaring fire beside her husband, enjoying with him the frolics of the babies, and banishing for the nonce the subject which had so engrossed their thoughts outside. The delayed meal was soon steaming on the long table in the low, lean-to kitchen, and was despatched with avidity by the healthy and ravenous brood which constituted the good old-fashioned household of John Ranger and Annie Robinson, his wife.

"Children," said Mrs. Ranger, as an interval of silence gave her a chance to be heard, "did you know your father had sold the farm?"

A thunderbolt from a clear sky would hardly have created greater astonishment. True, John Ranger had been talking "new country" ever since the older children could remember anything; the theme was an old story,

invoking no comment. But now there was an ominous pause, followed with exclamations of mingled dissent and approval, to which the parents gave unrestricted liberty.

"I'm not going a single step; so there!" exclaimed Mary, a gentle girl of seventeen, who did not look her years, but who had a reason of her own for this unexpected avowal.

"My decision will depend on where we're going," cried Jean.

"Maybe your mother and I can be consulted, — just a little bit," said the father, laughing.

"We're going to Oregon; that's what," exclaimed Harry, who was as impulsive as he was noisy.

"How did you come to know so much?" asked Marjorie, the youngest of John Ranger's "Three Graces," as he was wont to style his trio of eldest daughters, who had persisted in coming into his household — much to his discomfort — before the advent of Harry, the fourth in his catalogue of seven, of whom only two were boys.

"I get my learning by studying o' nights!" answered Hal, in playful allusion to his success as a sound sleeper, especially during study hours.

"Of course you don't want to emigrate, Miss Mame," cried Jean, "but you can't help yourself, unless you run away and get married; and then you'll have to help everybody else through the rest of your life and take what's left for yourself, — if there's anything left to take! At least, that is mother's and Aunt Mary's lot."

"Jean speaks from the depths of long experience," laughed Mary, blushing to the roots of her hair.

"I'm sick to death of this cold kitchen," cried Jean, snapping her tea-towel in the frosty air of the unplastered lean-to. "Hurrah for Oregon! Hurrah for a warmer climate, and a snug cabin home among the evergreen trees!"

"Good for Jean!" exclaimed her father. "The

weather'll be so mild in Oregon we shall not need a tight kitchen."

"Is Oregon a tight house?" asked three-year-old Bobbie, whose brief life had many a time been clouded by the complaints of his mother and sisters, — complaints such as are often heard to this day from women in the country homes of the frontier and middle West, where more than one-half of their waking hours are spent in the unfinished and uncomfortable kitchens peculiar to the slave era, in which — as almost any makeshift was considered "good enough for niggers" — the unfinished kitchen came to stay.

The vigorous barking of Rover announced the approach of visitors; and the circle around the fireside was enlarged, amid the clatter of moving chairs and tables, to make room for Elijah Robinson and his wife, — the former a brother of Annie Ranger, and the latter a sister of John. The meeting between the sisters-in-law was expectant, anxious, and embarrassing.

"How did you like the news?" asked Mrs. Robinson, after an awkward silence.

"How did you like it?" was the evasive reply, as the twain withdrew to a distant corner, where they could exchange confidences undisturbed.

"I have n't had time to think it over yet," said Mrs. Ranger. "My greatest trouble is about leaving our parents. It seems as if I could not bear to break the news to them."

"Don't worry, Annie; they know already. When Lije told his mother that John was going to Oregon, she fainted dead away. When she revived and sat up, she wanted to come right over to see you, in spite of the storm."

"Just listen! How the wind does roar!"

"I don't see how your mother can live without you, Annie. I tried very hard to persuade Lije to refuse to buy John's farm; but he would have his way, as he

always does. Of course, we'll do all we can for the old folks, but Lije is heavily in debt again, with the ever-recurring interest staring us all in the face. John will want his money, with interest, — they all do, — and we know how rapidly it accumulates, from our own dearly bought experience, the result of poor Joe's troubles!"

"I hope my dear father and mother won't live very long," sighed Mrs. Ranger. "If John would only let me make them a deed to my little ten-acre farm! But I can't get him to talk about it."

II

EARLY LIFE IN THE MIDDLE WEST

THE surroundings of the budding daughters of the Ranger and Robinson families had thus far been limited, outside of their respective homes, to attendance at the district school on winter week-days when weather permitted, and on Sundays at the primitive church services held by itinerant clergymen in the same rude edifice.

Oh, that never-to-be-forgotten schoolhouse of the borderland and the olden time! Modelled everywhere after the same one-roomed, quadrangular pattern, — and often the only seat of learning yet to be seen in school districts of the far frontier, — the building in which the children of these chronicles received the rudimentary education which led to the future weal of most of them was built of logs unhewn, and roofed with "shakes" unshaven. One rough horizontal log was omitted from the western wall when the structure was raised by the men of the district, who purposely left the space for the admission of a long line of little window-panes above the rows of desks. A huge open fireplace occupied the whole northern

end of the room; rude benches rocked on the uneven puncheon floor and creaked as the students turned upon them to face the long desks beneath the little window-panes, or to confront the centre of the room. The children's feet generally swung to and fro in a sort of rhythmic consonance with the audible whispers in which they studied their lessons, — when not holding sly conversation, amid much suppressed giggling, with their neighbors at elbow, if the teacher's back was turned.

The busy agricultural seasons of springtime and summer, and often extending far into the autumn, prevented the regular attendance at school of the older children of the district, who were usually employed early and late, indoors and out, with the ever-exacting labors of the farm.

Up to the time of the departure of the Ranger family for the Pacific coast and for a brief time thereafter, the most of the summer and all of the winter clothing worn in the country districts of the middle West was the product of the individual housewife's skill in the use of the spinning-wheel, dye-kettle, and clumsy, home-made hand-loom.

But, few and far between as were the schoolhouses and schooldays of the border times, of which the present-day grandparent loves to boast, there was a rigorous course of primitive study then in vogue which justifies their boasting. Oh, that old-fashioned pedagogue! What resident of the border can fail to remember — if his early lot was cast anywhere west of the Alleghanies, at any time antedating the era of railroads — the austere piety and stately dignity of that mighty master of the rod and the rule, who never by any chance forgot to use the rod, lest by so doing he should spoil the child!

The terror of those days lingers now only as an amusing memory. The pain of which the rod and the rule were the instruments has long since lost its sting; but the sound morals inculcated by the teacher (whose

example never strayed from his precept) have proved the ballast needed to hold a level head on many a pair of shoulders otherwise prone to push their way into forbidden places.

And the old-fashioned singing-school! How tenderly the memory of the time-dulled ear recalls the doubtful harmony of many youthful voices, as they ran the gamut in a jangling merry-go-round! Did any other musical entertainment ever equal it? Then, when the exercises were over, and the stars hung high and glittering above the frosty branches of the naked treetops, and the crisp white snow crunched musically beneath the feet of fancy-smitten swains, hurrying homeward with ruddy-visaged sweethearts on their pulsing arms, did any other joy ever equal the stolen kisses of the youthful lovers at the parting doorstep, — the one to return to the parental home with an exultant throbbing at his heart, and the other to creep noiselessly to her cold, dark bedroom to blush unseen over her first little secret from her mother.

And there is yet another memory.

Can anybody who has enjoyed it ever forget the school of metrical geography which sometimes alternated, on winter evenings, with the singing-school? What could have been more enchanting, or more instructive withal, than those exercises wherein the States and their capitals were chanted over and over to a sort of rhymeless rhythm, so often repeated that to this day the old-time student finds it only necessary to mention the name of any State then in the Union to call to mind the name of its capital. After the States and their capitals, the boundaries came next in order, chanted in the same rhythmic way, until the youngest pupil had conquered all the names by sound, and localities on the map by sight, of all the continents, islands, capes, promontories, peninsulas, mountains, kingdoms, republics, oceans, seas, rivers, lakes, harbors, and cities then known upon the planet.

In its season, beginning with the New Year, came the

regular religious revival. No chronicles like these would be complete without its mention, since no rural life on the border exists without it. Much to the regret of doting parents who failed to get all their dear ones "saved" — especially the boys — before the sap began to run in the sugar maples, the revival season was sometimes cut short by the advent of an early spring. The meetings were then brought to a halt, notwithstanding the fervent prayers of the righteous, who in vain besought the Lord of the harvest to delay the necessary seed-time, so that the work of saving souls might not be interrupted by the sports and labors of the sugar camp, which called young people together for collecting fagots, rolling logs, and gathering and boiling down the sap.

Many were the matches made at these rural gatherings, as the lads and lasses sat together on frosty nights and replenished the open fires under the silent stars.

To depict one revival season is to give a general outline of all. The itinerant preacher was generally a young man and a bachelor. In his annual returns to the scenes of his emotional endeavors to save the unconverted, he would find that many had backslidden; and the first week was usually spent in getting those who had not "held out faithful" up to the mourners' bench for re-conversion.

Agnostics, of whom John Ranger was an example, were many, who took a humorous or good-naturedly critical view of the situation. But the preacher's efforts to arouse the emotional nature, especially of the women, began to bear fruit generally after the first week's praying, singing, and exhorting; and the excitement, once begun, went on without interruption as long as temporal affairs permitted. The rankest infidel in the district kept open house, in his turn, for the preacher and exhorter; and once, when the schoolhouse was partly destroyed by fire, John Ranger permitted the meetings to be held in his house till the damage was repaired by the tax-payers of the district.

The kindly preacher who most frequently visited the Ranger district as a revivalist would not knowingly have given needless pain to a fly. But, when wrought up to great tension by religious frenzy, he seemed to find delight in holding the frightened penitent spellbound, while he led him to the very brink of perdition, where he would hang him suspended, mentally, as by a hair, over a liquid lake of fire and brimstone, with the blue blazes shooting, like tongues of forked lightning, beneath his writhing body; while overhead, looking on, sat his Heavenly Father, as a benignant and affectionate Deity, pictured to the speaker's imagination, nevertheless, as waiting with scythe in hand to snip that hair.

"I can't see a bit of logic in any of it!" exclaimed Jean Ranger, as she and Mary, accompanied by Hal, were returning home one night from such a meeting.

"God's ways are not our ways," sighed Mary, as she tripped over the frozen path under the denuded maple-trees, where night owls hooted and wild turkeys slept.

Harry laughed immoderately. "Jean, you're right," he exclaimed. "I'm going to get religion myself some day before I die, but I've got first to find a Heavenly Father who's better'n I am. There's no preacher on top o' dirt can make me believe that the great Author of all Creation deserves the awful character they're giving Him at the schoolhouse!"

"Don't blaspheme, Hal. It's wicked!" said Mary.

"I'm not blaspheming; I'm defending God!" retorted Hal.

"You used to be a sensible girl, Mame," said Jean; "and you could then see the ridiculous side of all this excitement just as Hal and I now see it. But you're in love with the preacher now, and that has turned your head."

Jean was cold and sleepy and cross; but she did not mean to be unkind, and on reflection added, "Forgive me, sister dear. I was only in fun. I have no right to

meddle with your love affairs or your religious feelings, and neither has Hal. S'pose we talk about maple sugar."

Mary did not reply, but her thoughts went toward heaven in silent, self-satisfying prayer.

The Reverend Thomas Rogers — so he must be designated in these pages, because he yet lives — was the avowed suitor for the hand and heart of Mary Ranger; and the winsome girl, with whose prematurely aroused affections her parents had no patience, — and with reason, for she was but a child, — was the envy of all the older girls of the district, any one of whom, while censuring her for her folly in encouraging the poverty-stricken preacher's suit, would gladly have found like favor in his eyes, if the opportunity had been given her.

But while romantic maidens were going into rhapsodies over their hero, and many of the dowager mothers echoed their sentiments, most of the unmarried men of the district remained aloof from his persuasions and unmoved by his fiery eloquence. But they took him out "sniping" one off-night in true schoolboy fashion; and while Mary Ranger dreamed of him in the seclusion of her snug chamber, the poor fellow stood half frozen at the end of a gulch, holding a bag to catch the snipes that never came.

"If I were not too poor in worldly goods to pay my way in your father's train, I'd go to Oregon," he said, a few nights after the "sniping" episode, as he walked homeward with Mary after coaxing Jean and Hal to keep the little episode a secret from their parents, — a promise they made after due hesitation, but with much sly chuckling, as they munched the red-and-white-striped sugar sticks with which they had been bribed.

III

MARRYING AND GIVING IN MARRIAGE

THE destinies of the Ranger and Robinson families had been linked together by the double ties of affinity and consanguinity in the first third of the nineteenth century. Their broad and fertile lands, to which they held the original title-deeds direct from the government, bore the signature and seal of Andrew Jackson, seventh President of the United States; and their children and children's children, though scattered now in the farthest West, from Alaska and the Hawaiian Islands to the Philippine Archipelago, treasure to this day among their most valued heirlooms the historic parchments. For these were signed by Old Hickory when the original West was bounded on its outermost verge by the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and when the new West, though discovered in the infancy of the century by Lewis and Clark (aided by Sacajawea, their one woman ally and pathfinder), was to the average American citizen an unknown country, quite as obscure to his understanding as was the Dark Continent of Africa in the days antedating Sir Samuel Baker, Oom Paul, and Cecil Rhodes.

The elder Rangers, who claimed Knickerbocker blood, and the Robinsons, who boasted of Scotch ancestry, though living in adjoining counties in Kentucky in their earlier years, had never met until, as if by accident, — if accident it might be called through which there seems to have been an original, interwoven design, — the fates of the two families became interlinked through their settlement upon adjoining lands, situated some fifty miles south of old Fort Dearborn, in the days when Chicago was a mosquito-beleaguered swamp, and Portland, Oregon, an unbroken forest of pointed firs.

There was a double wedding on the memorable day when John Ranger, Junior, and pretty Annie Robinson, the belle of Pleasant Prairie, linked their destinies together in marriage; and when, without previous notice to the assembled multitude or any other parties but their parents, the preacher, and the necessary legal authorities, Elijah Robinson and Mary Ranger took their allotted places beside their brother and sister, as candidates for matrimony, the festivities were doubled in interest and rejoicing.

"It seems but yesterday since our bonnie bairns were babes in arms," said the elder Mrs. Robinson, as she advanced with Mrs. Ranger *mère* to give a tearful greeting to each newly wedded pair. And there was scarcely a dry eye in the assembled multitude when the mother's voice arose in a shrill treble as she sang, in the ears of the startled listeners, from an old Scottish ballad the words, —

"An' I can scarce believe it true,
So late thy life began,
The playful bairn I fondled then
Stands by me now, a man!"

Her voice, which at first was as clear as the tones of a silver bell, quavered at the close of the first stanza and then ceased altogether. But by this time old Mrs. Ranger had caught the spirit of the ballad, and though her voice was husky, she cleared her throat and added, in a low contralto, the impressive lines, paraphrased somewhat to suit the occasion, —

"Oh, fondly cherish her, dearie;
She is sae young and fair!
She hasna known a single cloud,
Nor felt a single care.
And if a cauld world's storms should come,
Thy way to overcast,
Oh, ever stan' — thou art a man —
Between her an' the blast!"

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At the close of this stanza, Mrs. Ranger's voice broke also; and the good circuit rider, parson of many a scattered flock, who had pronounced the double ceremony, caught the tune and, in a mellow barytone that rose upon the air like an inspired benediction, added most impressively another stanza:

" An' may the God who reigns above
An' sees ye a' the while,
Look down upon your plighted troth
An' bless ye wi' His smile."¹

"It's high time there was a little change o' sentiment in all this!" cried a bachelor uncle, whose eyes were suspiciously red notwithstanding his affected gayety. "I move that we march in a solid phalanx on the victuals!"

The primitive cabin homes of the borderers of no Western settlement were large enough to hold the crowds that were invariably bidden to a neighborhood merrymaking. The ceremonies of this occasion, including a most sumptuous feast, were held on the sloping green beneath an overtopping elm, which, rising high above its fellows, made a noted landmark for a circumference of many miles.

People who live apart from markets, in fertile regions where the very forests drop richness, subsist literally on the fat of the land. Having no sale for their surplus products, they feast upon them in the most prodigal way. Although through gormandizing they beget malaria, not to say dyspepsia and rheumatic ails, they boast of "living well"; and the sympathy they bestow upon the city denizen who in his wanderings sometimes feasts at their hospitable boards, and praises without stint their prodigal display of viands, is often more sincere than wise.

¹ The writer has not been able to trace the date or origin of these stanzas. She learned them in her childhood of a Scotchwoman who recited them on a winter evening in her chimney corner, and who has long been dead. She herself has often recited the whole ballad at weddings within the past fifty years.

The lands of the early settlers, with whom these chronicles have to deal, had been surrounded, as soon as possible after occupancy, with substantial rail fences, laid in zigzag fashion along dividing lines, marking the boundaries between neighbors who lived at peace with each other and with all the world. These fences, built to a sufficient height to discourage all attempts at trespass by man or beast, were securely staked at the corners, and weighted with heavy top rails, or "riders," so stanchly placed that many miles of such enclosures remain to this day, long surviving the brawny hands that felled the trees and split the rails. In their mute eloquence they reveal the lasting qualities of the hardwood timber that abounded in the many and beautiful groves which flourished in the prairie States in the early part of the nineteenth century, when Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri comprised all that was generally known as the West.

Much of the primitive glory of these diversified landscapes departed long ago with the trees. The "Hook-and-Eye Dutch," as the thrifty followers of ancient Ohm are called by their American neighbors (with whom they do not assimilate), are rapidly replacing the old-time maple and black walnut fences with the modern barbed-wire horror; they are selling off the historical rails, stakes and riders and all, to the equally thrifty and not a whit more sentimental timber-dealers of Chicago, Milwaukee, and Grand Rapids, to be manufactured into high-grade lumber, which is destined to find lodgment as costly furniture in the palatial homes, gilded churches, great club-houses, and mammoth modern hostelries that abound on the shores of Lake Michigan, Massachusetts Bay, Manhattan Island, and Long Island Sound. But no vandalism yet invented by man can wholly despoil the rolling lands of the middle West of their beauty, nor rob Mother Nature of her power to rehabilitate them with the living green of cultivated loveliness.

Original settlers of the border-lands had little time and

less opportunity for the observation of the beautiful in art or nature. Their lives were spent in toil, which blunted many of the finer sensibilities of a more leisurely existence. The hardy huntsman who spent his only hours of relaxation in chasing the wild game, and the weary mother who scarcely ever left her wheel or loom and shuttle by the light of day, except to bake her bread before a great open fire while preparing food, or to nurse to sleep the future lawmakers of a coming world-round republic, were alike too busy to ponder deeply the far-reaching possibilities of the lives they led.

Such men of renown as Lincoln, Douglas, Baker, Grant, Logan, and Oglesby were evolved from environments similar to these, as were also the numerous adventurous borderers not known to fame (many of whom are yet living) who crossed the continent with ox teams, and whose patient and enduring wives nursed the future statesmen of a coming West in fear and trembling, as they protected their camps from the depredations of the wily Indian or the frenzy of the desert's storms.

Rail-making in the middle West was long a diversion and an art. The destruction of the hardwood timber, which if spared till to-day would be almost priceless, could not have been prevented, even if this commercial fact had been foreseen. The urgent need of fuel, shelter, bridges, public buildings, and fences allowed no consideration for future values to intervene and save the trees.

In times of a temporary lull in a season's activities, when, for a wonder, there were days together that the stroke of the woodman's ax was not heard and the music of the cross-cut saw had ceased, the settler would take advantage of the interim to draw a bead with unerring aim upon the eye of a squirrel in a treetop, or bring down a wild turkey from its covert in the lower branches; or, if favored by a fall of virgin snow, it would be his delight to track the wild deer, and drag it home as a

trophy of his marksmanship, — an earnest of the feast in which all his neighbors were invited to partake.

Then, too, there were the merrymakings of the border. What modern banquet can equal the festive board at which a genial hostess, in a homespun cotton or linsey-woolsey gown, presided over her own stuffed turkey, huge corn-pone, and wild paw-paw preserves? What array of glittering china, gleaming cut-glass, or burnished silver, can give the jaded appetite of the *blasé* reveller of to-day the enjoyment of a home-set table, laden with the best and sweetest "salt-rising" bread spread thick with golden butter, fresh from the old-fashioned churn? The freshest of meats and fish regularly graced the well-laden board, in localities where the modern *chef* was unknown, where ice-cream was unheard of, and terrapin sauce and lobster salad found no place. House-raising, log-rollings, barn-raising, quilting bees, weddings, christenings, and even funerals, were times of feasting, though these last were divested of the gayety, but not of the gossip, that at other times abounded; and the sympathetic aid of an entire neighborhood was always voluntarily extended to any house of mourning. There were few if any wage-earners, the accommodating method of exchanging work among neighbors being generally in vogue.

Such, in brief, were the daily customs of the early settlers of the middle West, whose children wandered still farther westward in the forties and fifties, carrying with them the habits in which they had been reared to the distant Territory afterwards known as the "Whole of Oregon," which originally comprised the great Northwest Territory, where now flourish massive blocks of mighty States.

Prior to the time of the departure of the subjects of these chronicles for the goal of John Ranger's ambition, but one unusual occurrence had marred the lives and

prosperity of the rising generation of Rangers and Robinsons. To the progenitors of the two families the mutations of time had brought problems serious and difficult, not the least of which was the infirmity of advancing years. This they had made doubly annoying through having assigned to their children, when they themselves needed it most, everything of value which they had struggled to accumulate during their years of vigorous effort to raise and educate their families.

In the two households under review, all dependent upon the energies and bounty of the second generation of Rangers and Robinsons, there were besides the great-grandmother (a universal favorite) two sexagenarian bachelor uncles and two elderly spinsters, the latter remote cousins of uncertain age, uncertain health, and still more uncertain temper, who had long outlived their usefulness, after having missed, in their young and vigorous years, the duties and responsibilities that accompany the founding of families and homes of their own. It was little wonder that drones like these were out of place in the overcrowded households of their more provident kinspeople, to whom the modern "Home of the Friendless" was unknown. What plan to pursue in making necessary provision for these outside incumbents, even John Ranger, the optimistic leader of the related hosts, could not conjecture.

"We've fixed it, — Mame and I," said Jean, one evening, after an anxious discussion of the question had been carried on with some warmth between the two family heads, in which no conclusion had been reached except a flat refusal on the part of Elijah Robinson to quadruple the quota of dependants in his own household.

"And how have you fixed it?" asked her father, who often called Jean his "Heart's Delight."

"Our bachelor uncles and cousins are just rusting out with irresponsibility!" she cried with characteristic Ranger vehemence. "They ought to have a home of

their own and be compelled to take care of it. There's that house and garden where you board and lodge the mill-hands. Why not give 'em that and let 'em keep boarders? The boarders, the four acres of ground, and the cow and garden ought to keep them in modest comfort. This would make them free and independent, as everybody ought to be."

"But the boarding-house belongs with the farm. I've sold it to your uncle."

"Then let Uncle Lije lease or sell it to them, share and share alike."

"What is it worth?" asked Mary.

"Only about three hundred dollars, the way property sells now," said her uncle.

"Then let 'em pay you rent. The place ought to support them and pay interest and taxes."

"Yes," cried Mary; "the old bachelor contingent, that worry you all so much because you keep 'em dependent on your bounty, can take care of themselves for twenty years to come, if you'll only let 'em."

"The proposition is worth considering, certainly," said their father, smiling admiringly upon his daughters.

"And we'll consider it, too," said the uncle. "That much is settled."

IV

OLD BLOOD AND NEW

"I CAN'T see why old folks like us will persist in living after we've outgrown our usefulness," exclaimed Grandfather Ranger, one sloppy March evening, as he entered the little kitchen and placed a pail of foaming milk upon the clean white table. The severely cold weather had given way to a springtime thaw; but a wet snow had begun falling at sundown, and a soft,

muddy liquid made dirty pools wherever his feet pressed the polished floor.

"You're right, father; we've lived long enough," sighed the feeble mother of many children, following her husband's footprints with mop and broom.

"If you and John think you've lived long enough, what do you think of me?" cried the great-grandmother, who had passed her fourscore years and ten, but who still amply supported herself (if only she and the rest of the family had thought so) as she sat from early morning till late at night in her corner, knitting, always knitting.

"Never mind, grannie," said her son, swallowing a lump that rose unbidden in his throat. "You've as good a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as any fellow that ever put his name to a Declaration of Independence! There'll be room for you in the cosiest corner of this little house as long as there's a corner for anybody. Don't worry."

"But this state of things isn't just or fair!" exclaimed the wife, folding her last bit of mending and dropping back into her chair. "It seems to me that we, as parents, deserve a better fate in our old days than any set of bachelor hangers-on on earth, who've never had anybody but themselves to provide for. If Joseph would only come back, or the good Lord would let us know his fate, I could endure the rest."

"There, there, mother! Not another word. Have n't I forbidden the mention of his name?"

"But he was our darling, father. I can't dismiss him from my thoughts as you say you can."

"We must keep the grandchildren in ignorance of his existence, wife. It's bad enough in all conscience for the stain of his misguided life to rest on older heads. We must forget our unfortunate son."

"I can never forget my bonnie boy, — not even to obey you, father!"

The back door, which had been unintentionally left ajar, flew open, and Jean, who had for the first time in her life heard a word of complaint from her grandparents, or a word from them concerning her mysterious Uncle Joe, burst suddenly into the room and knelt at the feet of her grandmother, her whole frame convulsed with sobs.

"Forgive us, darlings, do!" she cried as soon as she could control her voice to speak. "You've borne so much sorrow, and we never knew it! We never meant to be thoughtless or unkind, but I see now how ungrateful we have been. We must have hurt your feelings often."

"Don't cry, Jean," and the thin hand of the grandmother stroked the girl's bright hair. "We don't often repine at our lot. I am sorry you overheard a word."

"But I am not sorry a single bit, grandma. We children have been thoughtless and impudent. I can see it all now. We didn't ever mean to complain, though, about you, or grandpa, or you either, grannie dear. We only meant to draw the line at bachelor great-uncles and meddlesome second and third cousins, who ought to have provided themselves in their youth with homes of their own, as our parents did."

"Do you think they can help themselves hereafter, Jean?"

"Why, of course! The feeling of self-dependence will make 'em young and strong again, — though they don't deserve good treatment, for they ought to have had homes and families of their own in their youth, as you did."

"It's too late to lodge a complaint of that kind against them now, Jean," said the grandmother, with a smile.

"Did you overhear all we were talking about?" asked the grandfather, his head bowed upon his cane.

"I am afraid I did, grandpa. I was cleaning the slush from my shoes, and I could n't help overhearing,

though I hate eavesdroppers, on general principles. They never hear any good of themselves. But, say, grandpa, what about our Uncle Joe, whom I heard you denounce so bitterly? You have n't said I must n't speak his name, you know."

"Don't talk about him, child, to us or anybody else. He's an outlaw. Dismiss him from your thoughts, just as I have."

"Your uncle may not be living now, Jean; if he is alive, I hope he'll find a better friend than his father," exclaimed the great-grandmother, speaking in a tone of reproach that surprised none more than herself.

"Tell me all about it, grand-daddie darling! Do! I know there's a sad secret somewhere in the family. Something unusual must have happened a long time ago to bring us all under the ban of poverty. I have heard hints of it now and then all my life; and now I must hear the whole story. The schoolmaster will tell me if you don't."

"No, no, Jean," exclaimed her grandfather, anxiously. "Don't speak of family affairs outside. It is never seemly."

"Neither is it seemly or just to keep members of the family in ignorance of family affairs when all the rest of the neighborhood knows all about 'em! We ought to know all, grandma darling. The reason children are so often unreasonable is that they don't understand."

"'I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread,'" said the grandfather, his head still bowed low upon his staff and his white locks falling over his stooping shoulders. "Let us not repine, mother."

"I am not repining, father, but I do feel so — so disappointed with the outcome of all our hard struggles that I can't always be cheerful."

"We'd just begun to get our heads above water when it happened, Jean," said the old man. "We'd been

making a new farm. You see, we'd manumitted our slaves before we left Kaintuck, and we had to begin with our bare hands in this new country and work our way from the ground up. We'd only got a part o' the children raised when the older ones began to get it in their heads to get married. But our second son took to book-learning, and we sent him off to Tennessee to finish his schooling. That cost a pile o' money. Then we had to set out the married ones. We'd got things going in tol'ble shape and was beginning to get on our feet again, when Joseph —"

"Do stop, husband. Don't tell any more; please don't," cried the grandmother, nervously stroking the bright young head that nestled in her lap. "I cannot bear to hear it, though I thought I could."

"Let him go on, grandmother dear! I don't want to be driven to the schoolmaster for the information that I am bound to get someday. When I have grandchildren of my own, I'll tell 'em everything they ought to know about the family, and then they won't be teased by the school-children, as we are."

"We had to mortgage the farm," continued the grandfather; "and then there came a financial panic. The wild-cat banks of the country all went to pieces, and the bottom kind o' fell out o' things."

"But why did you borrow money, grandpa? Why was it necessary to mortgage the farms?"

"We did it because we had to stand by Joe in his trouble."

"What did you hear at school, darling?" asked the grandmother.

"Oh, nothing much. But one day Jim Danover got mad at me because I went head in the class; and he said I need n't be puttin' on airs, for everybody knew that my uncle had been hung."

"Good Lord! has it come to that?" cried the great-grandmother, dropping her knitting to the floor and

clasping her withered hands over her knees. "I've always told you that you'd better tell the older children about it yourself, John."

"No, Jean; your uncle was n't hung," said the old man; "but he got into trouble, and we all believe he is dead. He was the pride and joy of us all. He was so promising that we gave him all the education that ought to have been distributed evenly through the family."

"But John and Mollie took a notion to get married young, and you know that ended their chances," interposed the mother.

"Your uncle's trouble would never have come upon him and us if he had stayed out o' that college," exclaimed the great-grandmother, who did not approve of the course the family had taken with Joseph at the beginning of his college days.

"That's true, grannie," replied the father; "but he ought to have kept out o' the scrape, college or no college."

"Do go on," cried Jean.

"Your Uncle Joe got mixed up in a hazing frolic, or something o' that sort," resumed the grandfather. "One or two of the students got hurt, one of 'em so bad that he died,—or it was given out that he died,—and the blame fell on Joe. He declared he was n't guilty, but the college authorities had to fix the blame somewhere, though the case was uncertain. They never proved that the boy was dead, but we raised the money and bailed Joe out o' jail. When the story was started that the fellow had died, Joe skipped his bail and left us all in a hole. That was what made and has kept us poor."

"Did you never hear of the other man, grandpa?"

"Oh, yes; he turned up, but too late to do Joe or the rest of us any good."

"Poor dear Uncle Joe!"

"You'd better say poor dear all the rest of us," cried

the great-grandmother, who had staked and lost her little all in the great calamity.

"But Uncle Joe was sinned against, grannie dear. How he must have suffered!"

"Them that's sinned against are often greater sufferers than them that sins," was the sad reply.

"When the bail was jumped, the hard times set in with all of us," resumed the grandfather. "The banks, as I was saying, went broke, the interest on the mortgages piled up, and the notes fell due. The crops got the rust and the weevil, and everything else went wrong. You see, Jean, when a man starts down hill, everybody tries to give him a kick. The long and the short of it is that mother, here, and grannie and I have been the same as paupers for more than a dozen years."

"I must be going, though you must first tell me how you two and dear old grannie are going to live when we are away in Oregon. Your way seems very uncertain," said Jean.

"Your father has made some kind of a bargain for our support with your Uncle Lije. But he's sort o' visionary, and he never has much luck. If he loses the property, we can go to the poorhouse."

"Are you to be allowed no stated sum to live on? Will you have no means of your own to gratify your individual wishes or tastes?"

"No, child; not a picayune."

"What's a picayune?"

"A six-and-a-quarter-cent piece."

"I'm just as wise as I was before."

"They're wellnigh out o' circulation nowadays, though I used to come across 'em frequently when I was sheriff," said the old man.

Jean covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"Don't worry about us, dearie," said the old man.

"There is One above us who heareth even the young

ravens when they cry. There is not a sparrow that falleth to the ground without His knowledge. Your Uncle Lije will move into the old homestead when you are all gone. Your father built this cottage for us when he assumed the mortgage, as you know. We won't be entirely alone, but we'll miss you all; and we'll try to remember that we are of more value than many sparrows."

"I've heard such talk as that all my life, grandpa. But I can't help thinking that it would have been better to keep the ravens from having anything to cry about in the first place, and to save the sparrows from falling."

"If none o' God's creatures ever had any hard experiences, they'd never know enough to enjoy their blessings, Jean. A child has to stumble and hurt itself many times before it learns to walk steady. We've all got to be purified and saved, as by fire, before we are fit to stand in the presence of the awful God."

"The God I love and worship is n't an awful God," cried Jean. "I could n't love Him if He were awful. My earthly daddie whipped me once. No doubt I deserved the punishment, but I could n't love him for a whole month afterwards. And I'd have hated him for the rest of my life if I had n't deserved the whipping."

"Did n't it do you any good?"

Jean confronted her grandfather, her eyes flashing. "No, sir!" she cried. "I ought not to have been whipped, and I was n't a bit repentant after the punishment. I was sorry beforehand, though, and said so."

"What was your offence, Jean?"

"I dropped a pan full of dishes and broke more than half o' the lot. They fell to the floor with a crash, and scared me half to death."

"Did n't the whipping make you more careful afterwards?"

"Not at all; it only made me mad and afraid and nervous, so I broke more dishes. But the next time it

happened, I hid the broken pieces in the ash hopper, and when they were found, I saved myself a whipping by telling my first lie."

"The Lord chasteneth whom He loveth, my child."

"I once saw a mill-hand strike his wife," retorted Jean, "and he said, as she rubbed her bruises, 'I love you, Mollie. Take another kick!' But I must go now. Be of good cheer. And remember, when I get to Oregon and get to making money, you shall have every cent that I can spare."

V

SALLY O'DOWD

GR^EAT excitement prevailed in the rural neighborhood when it became generally known that John Ranger, Junior, had sold the farm and was preparing to dispose of his sawmill and all his personal belongings, with the intention of departing to the new and far-away West in an ox-wagon train with his family, — an undertaking that seemed to his friends as foolhardy as would have been an attempt to reach the North Pole with his wife and children in a balloon.

Of more than ordinary ability, enterprise, and daring, John Ranger had long been a man of note in his bailiwick. Twice he had represented his county in the State Legislative Assembly; but when the Old Line Whigs of his district offered to nominate him for Congress, — "No, gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "I started out early in life to assist my good wife in rearing and educating a big family of young Americans. I frankly admit that we've got a bigger job on hand than either of us imagined it would be when we made the bargain; but that does n't lessen our mutual responsibility. There is always a regiment, more or less, of unencumbered men

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in waiting in every locality, ready and willing to wear the toga of office; so, with thanks for the proffered honor, I must beg to be excused."

But there was one office, that of justice of the peace, which he never refused, and to which he had been so often re-elected that the appellation of "Squire" had grown to belong to him as a matter of course. One room of the great barnlike farmhouse had long been set apart as his office; and many were the litigants who remained after office hours to be entertained at his hospitable board.

"It's a lot of trouble, having so much extra company on account of your office being in the house," his wife said at times; "but it's better than having you away two-thirds of your time down town, so it is all right."

"There's a woman going round the corner to the office," exclaimed Mary, one evening, just as her father had settled himself before the fire to enjoy a frolic with the little ones.

"It's that grass widow, Sally O'Dowd," said Mrs. Ranger.

"She's booked for a solid hour," snapped Marjorie, "and we'll have to delay supper till nine o'clock."

The Squire had barely time to reach his office by an inner passage and seat himself before the fire, when Mrs. O'Dowd — an oversized, plainly dressed, intelligent-looking woman, who was remarkably handsome, notwithstanding the expression of pain upon her face — entered the office and stood silent before the open fire.

"Well," exclaimed the Squire, impatiently, motioning her to a chair, "what can I do for you now?"

"Oh, Squire!" she cried, ignoring the proffered chair and dropping on her knees at his feet, her wealth of rippling hair falling about her face and over her shapely shoulders like a deluge of gold, "I want you to take me with you to Oregon."

"What! And leave your children to the care of others? I didn't think that of you, Mrs. O'Dowd."

"But what else can I do? You know the court has assigned the custody of all three of my babies to Sam."

"Yes, Sally; but you can see them once in a while if you stay here."

"The court gave them to Samuel and his mother absolutely, you know."

"Yes, yes, child; and while in one way it is hard, if you look at it in a practical light, you will see that it was best for the children. You couldn't keep them with you and go out as hired help in anybody's kitchen; and you have no other means of support any more."

"If I stay here, I cannot have even the poor privilege of caring for them, except when they're sick. I must get entirely away from their vicinity, or lose my senses altogether."

"I thought that was what was the matter when you married the fellow, Sally. You certainly had lost your senses then."

"But love is blind, Squire — till it gets its eyes open; and then it is generally too late to see to any advantage. Little did my dear father think, when he made a will leaving his homestead, his bank account, and all his belongings to me, that he was reducing my dear mother and me to beggary."

"But that would n't have happened if you had n't married that worthless fellow, Sally."

"But the *if* exists, Squire. I married the fellow. It was an awful blunder, — I'll admit that. But it was n't a crime. It should have been no reason for robbing me. And yet this marriage was made the legal pretext for permitting the robbery. Oh, I was so glad when my dear mother died! I could n't have shed a tear at her grave if I'd been hung for my seeming heartlessness. Poor mother! I was made an unwilling party to a robbery

that beggared her and myself. Then, when I could no longer endure the presence of the robber and his accomplice, and live, I was doubly, yes, trebly robbed, by being deprived of my children."

The Squire cleared his throat and spoke huskily.

"That will was a sad mistake of your father's, Sally. He should have left his property to your mother. It was wrong to put her means of livelihood in jeopardy by leaving all to you. He ought to have known you'd marry, and that the property would accrue to your husband."

"But mother insisted that all should be left to me. She even waived her right of dower, in my interest—as she thought."

... "Well, Sally, you can't say that I did n't warn you."

The woman laughed hysterically. "Much good that warning can do me now!" she cried, rising to her feet and unconsciously assuming a dramatic pose. "We had n't been married a week when he ordered my mother out of my house. And then he installed his own mother in my home, and expected me to be silent. Oh, I am so glad my dear mother is dead! I would rejoice if my poor, defrauded children were all dead also."

The Squire cleared his throat again and leaned forward on his hands. "The law recognizes the husband and wife as one, and the husband as that one, Mrs. O'Dowd."

"Yes, yes, I know that, to my bitter sorrow," she said with a meaning smile, her white teeth shining through her parted lips and her eyes flashing. The woman sank upon the hearth, looking strangely white and calm.

John Ranger sighed helplessly. "I worked the underground railroad last night for all it was worth, in the interest of some runaway niggers," he said under his breath; then audibly, "The laws of the land must be obeyed, my child."

"The law is a fiend," cried Jean, who had entered the

room unobserved and had stood listening in the shadow of the chimney jamb. "I'll never rest till this awful one-sided power is broken. You know yourself that it's a monster, daddie. I know you know it, or you'd never help a run —"

He put his finger on his lips, and the girl changed the subject. The underground railroad was a forbidden topic in the Ranger household.

"Because Sally Danover knew no better than to become the wife of an unworthy man, — who knew what he was about, though she did n't, — the law declares that all the benefits resulting from the fraudulent transaction must accrue to the villain in the case, and all the penalties must be borne by his victim. What would you do to such a fellow, daddie, if I should marry him?"

John Ranger did not answer, but gazed steadily into the fire, his brow contracted and his thoughts gloomy.

"Sally, cheer up!" cried Jean, shaking the woman by the shoulder. "Daddie's a whole lot better man than he thinks he is. I've seen him tested. You're as good as a nigger, if you *are* white, and he'll help you."

"You don't know what you're talking about, my daughter. It's a crime to break the law, and crime must be followed by fitting punishment."

"If you get caught, you get punished," cried Jean, laughing in her father's face. "To break such a law would be an act of heroism for which I should be glad to be arrested and sent to jail! It would be an act of heroism beside which the defence of the Stars and Stripes would be cowardice!" she cried in a transport of fury.

"Come, Jean," said her father, rising, "we must go to supper. Won't you join us, Mrs. O'Dowd?"

"Food would choke me," said the visitor, bowing herself out.

"Hang the luck!" said the Squire, as the door slammed behind her.

"What are you going to do to help the poor woman, John?" asked Mrs. Ranger, as the family sat at the belated meal.

"Ask Jean."

"What do you know about the case, daughter?"

"She thinks she knows a lot," interrupted her father. "She'd 'a' made a plaguy good lawyer if she'd only been born a boy."

"Who knew best what I ought to be, — you or God?" asked Jean, her eyes glowing like stars.

"I give it up," replied her father, smiling.

"I was reading to-day," said Mrs. Ranger, "of a man down East who lured his runaway wife back home by stealing the babies and then warning everybody through the papers, and by posters, not to trust or harbor her, under penalty of the law. The woman held out quite a spell, but cold and hunger got the better of her at last; and when the stolen children fell sick, she went back to her lawful protector and stayed till she died, as meek as any lamb."

"Sally Danover won't go back to Sam O'Dowd; she'll die first," cried Mary; "and I glory in her grit."

"You have n't answered my question, John," said Mrs. Ranger. "What do you propose to do with Sally O'Dowd?"

"I s'pose I'll have to take her to Oregon and let her take a new start. She says she must get away from here, or go insane."

"I'd go crazy if I had to leave my children, John."

"You can boast, Annie; you can afford to. But if you were in Sally's shoes, you'd sing a different song."

Mrs. Ranger shrugged her shoulders.

"I can't see why women with good husbands and happy homes are so ready to censure less fortunate women for breaking bonds that are unbearable," said her husband. "Women are women's worst enemies."

"Sam O'Dowd's no woman," exclaimed Jean.

"There's not a woman on top o' dirt that'd treat any man as he's treated Sally."

"I guess it's about an even stand-off," rejoined her mother.

"No," cried Jean. "The conditions are not equal. No woman has the power to turn her husband out of doors. Even if it is her own house, he is its lawful master. Women don't stand any show at all compared with men."

"Jean is going to-morrow to see Sam O'Dowd's mother. She can make matters smooth for Sally if anybody can," said the Squire.

"The sale of our effects is only two weeks off, John," said his wife, when they were alone. "I want to reserve a few things that are sacred. There's Baby Jamie's cradle, that you made from the hollow section of that old gum-tree that stood in the back pasture. Do you remember how nicely I lined it with the back breadths of my wedding dress?"

"Could I forget it, Annie?"

"Then there's my mother's little old spinning-wheel. It was my grandmother's and great-grandmother's. May I keep it for Mary?"

"It won't pay to haul such things over the plains, Annie. Better let your mother keep 'em here till there's a transcontinental railroad."

"But that won't come in my time, John."

VI

THE BEGINNING OF A JOURNEY

THE sale of Squire Ranger's effects proceeded without unnecessary delay. The sawmill, the first portable structure of its kind ever seen west of the Wabash River, was eagerly purchased on credit by a waiting customer, and work at the mill went on without interruption. What a primitive affair it was! And how like a pygmy it seems as the resident on the North Pacific's border recalls its littleness, and contrasts it with the mammoth mills of Oregon, the lower Columbia, and Puget Sound, which grasp in their giant arms the dead leviathans of the primeval forest, and set their teeth to work tearing to pieces the patient upbuilding of the ages gone!

The motive power of John Ranger's sawmill consisted of about a dozen superannuated horses, some spavined, some ringboned, some wind-broken, all more or less disabled in some way; these were regularly harnessed, each in his turn, to a set of horizontal radiating shafts attached to a rotating centre, above which, on a little platform, stood the driver, with a whip.

"I know it's wicked to kill the trees and cut them up into boards; it's just as wicked as it is to kill pigs and cattle," was Mary Ranger's comment when she first beheld the frantic work of the raging saw, which, screaming like a demon, ate its way through hearts of oak and hickory, or tore the slabs from the sides of the black-walnut and sugar-maple patriarchs with ever unsated ferocity.

But this sawmill had long been a boon to the entire country, as was evidenced by the multiplication, since its advent, of framed houses, barns, bridges, school-

houses, and churches, which suddenly sprang into vogue, not to mention the many miles of planked highways that rushed into fashion before the railroad era in the days when "good roads conventions" were unheard of.

Children born and reared in cities — subject, if of the tenant class, to frequent changes of habitation, or, if their homes are permanent, to frequent intervals of travel — can have little idea of the love which children of the country cherish for the farms and homes to which they are born, and in which their brief lives are spent. The very soil on which they have trodden is dear to them, and seems instinct with sentience. They make a boon companion of everything with which they come in contact, whether pertaining to the earth, the water, or the air. Their little gardens are familiar friends; the flowers of the wildwood are loving entities; the brook that sings in summer through the tangled grass and sleeps in winter under a bed of ice is always a communing spirit. The sighing winds chant rhythmic lullabies in the treetops, and the language of every insect, bird, and beast has, to them, a distinctive meaning. The blue heavens are their delight, and the passing clouds their friends. The sun, the moon, and the stars hold converse with them, and the changing seasons bring to them, each in its turn, peculiar joy.

But, dearly as they loved the old home and its surroundings, the Ranger children, who had never crossed the boundary of township number twelve, range three west, in which they were born, looked forward eagerly to the forthcoming journey. Once only had Mrs. Ranger ventured beyond the township limits since leaving the Kentucky home of her childhood; and that was many years before, when she went with her husband to the county seat to attach her mark to the fateful mortgage, upon which the accruing interest seemed always to be maturing at the time when she or the children were the most in need of books or shoes or clothing.

"I was n't allowed to learn to write in my childhood," she falteringly explained to the notary, when, after affixing her mark, she watched him as he attached his seal to the document which was to be as a millstone about her neck forever after. "My father always thought that education was bad for girls," she added. "He said if they knew how to write they'd be forging their husbands' names and getting their money out of the bank. And he said, too, that if girls learned to write, they'd be sending love letters to the boys."

"It's never too late to learn," was the notary's reply. "If I were you, I would learn to write when the children learn. You can do it if you try."

"I'd be glad to, if I could find the time; but it's hard to learn anything for one's own especial benefit with a baby always in one's arms. When the children get big enough to learn to write, I'll try, though."

And she did; with such success that she never after signed her name with a cross.

"I'm glad we've got that mortgage off our hands at last, Annie," said her husband as they counted up the somewhat disappointing returns after the sale of their personal effects was over.

"But you're not morally free from it, John, or even legally so. If the purchaser should fail, the load would then revert to Lije, you know. Say, John, can't I deed my little ten-acre farm to my father and mother? It never cost you anything. I took care of old man Eustis for six long years; and you know he gave the little farm to me as pay for my services, absolutely."

"Have n't I paid its taxes all along, Annie?"

"And have I earned nothing all this time, my husband?"

"Oh, yes, you've earned a living; and you've got it as you went along, have n't you?"

Mrs. Ranger made no reply, but being silenced was not being convinced.

"Be patient," said Jean, aside. "I'll manage it."

Several pairs of great brown-eyed oxen, with which the children had become familiar in their days of logging about the sawmill, were easily trained for the long journey; but others, untamed and terrified, as if pre-sensing the trials awaiting them through untracked deserts, submitted to the yoke only under the cruelest compulsion. New wagons, stanchly built and covered with white canvas hoods, stretched tightly over hickory bows, were ranged on the lawn, under the naked, creaking branches of the big elm-tree. Provisions, resembling in quantity the supplies for a small army, were carted to the front veranda, awaiting shipment down the Illinois and Mississippi rivers to St. Louis, to be reshipped up the Missouri to the final point of loading into wagons for crossing the Great American Desert, as the Great Plains were then known.

Visitors, including friends and relatives from far and near, came to the dismantled house in great relays, and the business of Squire Ranger's office as justice of the peace increased a dozen fold. All this commotion involved increasing labor for Mrs. Ranger, who faded visibly as she silently counted the intervening days before the hour of final separation from her sorrowing parents. If the Squire suffered at the thought of parting with anybody, he made no sign except to complain of a "pesky cold" that made his eyes water, which he attributed to the "beastly climate."

"The spirit of adventure that inspires my husband to emigrate does not permit him to foresee danger," was Mrs. Ranger's ever-ready reply to the numerous prophets of evil who came to condole, but got only their labor for their pains. "I will not try to interfere with his plans. I started out as a bride to walk the road of life beside him, and I mean to do as I agreed."

But the good wife grew thinner and whiter as the days sped on; and when at last the wagons were all ranged in line, with every yoke of oxen in place; when the last farewell had been spoken; when the last audible prayer had ascended heavenward, and the command to move on had been given, — she sank on her feather bed in the great family wagon and closed her eyes with a feeling of thankfulness akin to that of the sufferer from a fatal malady who realizes that his last hour has come.

“‘He giveth His beloved sleep,’” said Mary, softly, as she covered her mother with a heavy shawl.

It was now the first of April, a fitful, gray, and misty day. A soft breeze was stirring from the south, and straggling rays of sunlight struggled through occasional rifts in the straying clouds. The spring thaw had at last set in. The sticky soil adhered to the feet of man and beast, and clung in heavy masses to the wheels of wagons.

The dog, Rover, who had always willingly remained at home on watch during the family's absence at church or elsewhere, had hidden himself at starting-time; but he was found waiting in the road when the party was several miles out on the way, and, when discovered, approached his master with drooping tail and piteous whine.

There were tears in the eyes of the strong man, of which he was not ashamed, as he dismounted from the back of Sukie, his favorite mare, and, stooping, patted the dog affectionately on the head.

“They did n't fool 'oo, did 'ey, Rovie?” said Bobbie, as he hugged the dog, unmindful of his muddy coat.

“Come to me, Rover,” exclaimed Mrs. Ranger, who had been refreshed by her nap. The dog obeyed, and, wet and dirty as he was, attempted to hide himself among the baggage. But his hopes were blasted by a peremptory command from his master: “Go back home and stay with grandfather!” The poor brute jumped, whin- ing, to the ground and affected to obey; but he reap-

peared a dozen miles farther on, at the Illinois River's edge; and when the ferry-boat, which he was forbidden to enter, was out of reach of either command or missile, he sat on his haunches on the river-bank and howled dismally.

"Don't you think a dog has a soul, daddie?" asked Jean, through her tears.

"How should I know, daughter?" was the husky response. "I'm not yet certain that a man has a soul."

VII

SCOTTY'S FIRST ROMANCE

THE home that was to be the abode of the Ranger family during the journey was an over-jutting wagon-box, — Harry called it a "hurricane deck," — made to fit over the running gear of a substantial wagon, in which a dozen or more persons might be stowed away at night in crosswise fashion. It was named "the saloon" by the teamsters, in jocose recognition of its owner's well-known teetotal habits, and was assigned to the women and children as their especial domicile.

"It will be your duty to keep a daily record of our journey, Jean."

This was the first official order issued by Captain Ranger after he had been formally elected as commander of the expedition, and was given under the thickly falling snow, amid the bustle and confusion of making the first camp.

"What sort of a record?"

"A daily write-up of current events. Here is a brand-new blank-book I have bought for the purpose. And here's a portable inkstand, with some lead pencils, a

pocket knife, and a box of pens. I've selected you as scribe because you won the prize in that competitive contest over the doings of Bismarck."

"But that was a different proposition, daddie."

"It's all in the same line, Jean. You have a record to preserve now. You must keep your credit good. Look to your laurels, and don't forget!"

And Jean, partly from innate ambition, but chiefly because she was under orders from which she knew there could be no appeal, kept, through all the tedious journey, a diary, from which the chronicler of these pages proposes to cull such fragments as may fit into the narrative, without strict regard to chronology, though with due regard to facts.

"We made camp last night in the discomfort of a driving snowstorm," wrote the scribe under date of April 2. "But in spite of our sorrow over our departure from home and loved ones, the most of us were jolly, and we made the best we could of the situation. To-night, after a day's disagreeable wheeling through mud that freezes at night and thaws by day, making travel nasty, sticky, and tedious, we stopped for camp near an isolated farmhouse, where the goodwife is disheartened and sick, and the children are ragged, dirty, and frightened.

"The storm has abated, and the sky is clear. Our teamsters are kneeling on the ground around our mess-boxes, which are used for tables at mealtime, and stored in the ends of the wagons when we are moving ahead."

"There, I can't think of another word to write." She closed the book with a bang.

For many minutes after gathering around the tables, all were too busy with the supper to make any attempt at conversation.

Beans and bacon, coffee and crackers, and great heaps of stewed fruits, were reinforced by mountains of steam-

ing flapjacks, which Mary and Marjorie took turns at baking, their eyes watery from the smoke of the open fire, and their cheeks reddened by the wind.

"Wonder what's become o' Scotty," said Captain Ranger, as he knelt in the absent teamster's place at table and helped himself bountifully.

"He filled our water-buckets and was off like a shot," said Hal. "He ought to show up at mealtime. Ah, there he comes."

"Where've you been, Scotty?" asked the Captain. "Here's plenty of room. Kneel, and give an account of yourself."

"So you're in love, eh, Scotty? and with that pretty widow in the next camp?"

The questioner was a tall, lanky teamster, answering to the appellation of Shorty.

"Never in love before," said Scotty, as he swallowed his coffee with a gulp.

An uproarious laugh ran around the table.

"Her hair is like the flower o' Scotia's broom in springtime, and the sheen o' her eyes is like Loch Achray!" exclaimed Scotty, as he passed his plate for a fresh relay of flapjacks.

"A love affair does n't spoil his appetite," laughed Marjorie.

"I want you all to understand that no falling in love'll be allowed on this journey," said the Captain, dryly. "There'll be time enough for that kind o' nonsense after you get to Oregon and get settled."

"Love, like death, has all seasons for its own, sir," retorted Scotty, with a deferential bow.

"Women and war don't go together," replied his employer. "And you'll find this journey is a good deal like war before you're done with it."

"Everything is fair in both love and war, sir."

"Excuse me," said a woman in black, with a low, mellow voice and blond complexion, who might have

heard herself discussed if she had listened. The clatter around the table stopped instantly.

"We're in a quandary, mamma and I," she said, blushing. "Our matches are damp and won't burn. I thought perhaps —"

A half-dozen men were on their feet in an instant, and half-a-dozen hands went suddenly into half-a-dozen pockets, while half-a-dozen blocks of matches were forthcoming in less than half a minute.

"Here are more than I need, gentlemen, and I thank you ever so much," she said, taking the offer from Scotty; and, with a bow and a smile to all, she was gone.

"The red of her lips is like rubies, the white of her teeth is like pearls, and her voice is a symphony," said Scotty, looking after her as she ran.

"Scotty's attack is as sudden as it is serious," laughed Lengthy, a short, stocky teamster, whose nickname was a ludicrous misfit.

"What freak o' fate do you s'pose it was that brought that beauty out here on a journey like this?" asked Yank, a Southern-born teamster, whose accepted nickname was another palpable misnomer, and who dropped his *r*'s, like a negro preacher.

"I know!" cried Bobbie, his fingers dripping with molasses. "She came to meet Scotty."

The laugh that followed disconcerted the child, who ran, abashed, to his mother in the family wagon.

"I thought," exclaimed Sambo, — a gaunt Vermonter, who dropped his *g*'s as frequently as Yank dropped his *r*'s, — "I thought there 'd be several ladies comin' along, to keep us company."

"Can you tell us why Mrs. O'Dowd did n't join us?" asked Yank, turning deferentially to the Captain. "I thought we were to have the pleasure of one woman's company, — I mean in addition to the ladies present, of course."

Jean exchanged furtive glances with her father, who averted his face, and said: "That's a conundrum, Yank. Ask me something easy."

The next noticeable entry in Jean's diary was made on the fifth of April, and was as follows:—

"The snow this morning is four inches deep. We camped last night in the mud and slush, in a narrow lane, after a hard day's wheeling through the miry roads. Mother, dear woman, is weary and weak, but daddie got her a warm room in the farmhouse near us, where we children are allowed to go sometimes to thaw our marrow-bones by a pleasant fire.

"April 6. Cloudy to-day, with a threat of rain. But mother urges a forward movement, so Mary and Marjorie are packing the mess-boxes, and daddie says I must write up this horrid diary. There is nothing to write about. The country through which we are struggling is swampy, monotonous, muddy, and level. Cheap, rickety farmhouses are seen at intervals; the bridges are gone from most of the swollen streams; our way goes through narrow, muddy lanes, with crooked, tumble-down fences; and we see, every now and then, a discouraged-looking woman and a lot of half-clad children peeping through open doors, from the midst of a crowd of half-starved dogs. Daddie says these frontier people (and dogs) are the forerunners of all civilization; but I think they're the embodiment of desolation and discouragement.

"April 7. The ague has broken out among our teamsters. We stopped to-night at a farmhouse, where suspicious women treated us like so many thieves. The whole family were barefoot, and lacked everything but numbers. Mother says that starvation has aroused their cupidity, and we must n't mind their suspicious airs. They had no feed for sale for the stock, and no supplies to sell for our table; but there were plenty of guns and dogs, — the latter a thieving lot, — from which we shall

be glad to escape when we again see morning. Weather and roads no better.

"April 8. Mother quite ill again; but the skies are clear, and she insists on moving forward.

"April 11. No food for man or beast to be had for love or money. We must move onward, sick or well.

"April 12. A better-settled region. The scenery is often fine. Pussy-willows peep at us from marshy edges, and birds are singing in the budding treetops. Sick folks no better. Bought a liberal supply of corn for the stock, and a lot of butter, eggs, and chickens for the rest of us, so we have a feast in prospect. Camped on the edge of a pretty little village, on a nice green grass-plot. Daddie took us girls to a prayer-meeting. The good people eyed us askance. Evidently they thought us freaks. Certainly our slat sunbonnets and soiled linsey-woolsey dresses were not reassuring."

The next day, at nightfall, the party reached Quincy, on the Mississippi, and camped on a flat bit of upland outside of the city's limits, where many other wayfarers, like themselves, had halted and encamped.

"Did you notice Scotty?" asked Marjorie, approaching Jean, who sat on a wagon-tongue, trying to think of something out of the ordinary to jot in her journal.

"What's he up to now?"

"He's been preening his feathers like a turkey-gobbler for the last half-hour. Guess our pretty widow and her aristocratic mamma have caught up with our train. Just watch him! See how the ex-scientist, ex-statesman, ex-orator, and now ex-almost-everything is making a fool of himself!"

"All people, of both sexes, get a spell of the simples, sooner or later," laughed Jean. "Daddie says that when the system is in the right condition to catch it, one gets it bad."

"Guess I'll ride out and look over the town a little,

Annie," said the Captain to his wife after the family had retired for the night. "I want to look out a little for our Scotty. He seems to need a guardian."

Scotty, though a characteristic specimen of the educated Scotchman, was a loyal adherent of the institutions of his adopted country. He had been a member of the constitutional conventions of two border States, and was known as a writer and orator of no mean ability. But, like many another brilliant man, he had passed his fortieth year without acquiring a home, a family, or a competence. He was well versed in the "Rise and Fall of Republics," and had travelled much in foreign lands, — themes of which he never tired. But he could never reduce ox-driving to a science.

Captain Ranger rode to the top of the bluffs, where he leisurely contemplated the scene. Lights reflected from town and river danced and gleamed, but barely made the darkness visible in the muddy streets. Church bells rang, steamers whistled, and longshoremen tugged at heavy loads. Powerful horses propelled great, clumsy freight-wagons through the unpaved streets. Foot passengers picked their way through slop and mud.

"Railroads will come here some day," said the Captain to himself. "They will compete with the river traffic and cripple it. Other towns, like Chicago, will divert the trade, and there is no telling what the end will be. What a busy, bustling world it is, anyhow!"

"Halloa, Captain!"

"Well, I'm blanked if it is n't Scotty!"

"I've been to call upon the widows we met in the beginning of our journey, sir, and I've been thinking it would be a handsome thing for you to do if you'd take them into our company, Captain Ranger."

"We'll see about it, Scotty; but I'm afraid you won't earn your salt if I let them join us. I s'pose I'll have to risk it, though."

VIII

A BORDER INCIDENT

THE public roads or thoroughfares through which the party floundered when crossing the sparsely settled counties of western Illinois, which had noticeably improved during the day or two of travel from the East toward Quincy, grew almost impassable on the Missouri side of the Mississippi River. Heavy freight-wagons, each bearing an immense load of merchandise, chiefly hides and furs from the Northwest Territory, had stirred the mud in the narrow lane to a seemingly inexhaustible depth; and the long spell of freezing by night, followed daily by the inevitable thaw, caused the many unbridged streams to overflow their banks and inundate the wide wastes of bottom land through which the ox teams were compelled to wander blindly, in continual danger of disaster. But the most disagreeable experiences resulted from the frequent snow-storms, which generally occurred at camping-time, accompanied by chilling winds and intermittent falls of rain or sleet, covering the earth with a glare of ice.

"When I get to heaven, I mean to ask Saint Peter to assign all cooks to high seats," said Jean one evening, as, balancing a tray laden with tin cups and saucers, she paused above the heads of the men kneeling at the mess-boxes, and in apparent innocence upset a steaming cup upon the head of Yank.

"No harm done, I assure you, Miss Rangeah. Don't mention it!" he said, affecting not to feel the burn at the back of his neck, whereat Jean grew repentant.

"Do you s'pose Saint Peter will pay any heed to the request of a slip of a girl like you?" asked Hal.

"I'll not be a slip of a girl when I go through the gates o' heaven, but a mature matron, famous and honored."

"We are in a slave State now," wrote Jean, under date of April 16; "and from my limited experience I am forced to conclude that slavery is more deteriorating in its effects upon the white people we meet than it is upon the blacks. The primitive cultivating of the soil we saw in central Illinois, where the white men do their own farming, was bad enough, God knows; but the shiftless, aimless, happy-go-lucky work of the Missouri 'niggers,' as they style themselves, is even worse. The white men we see at times are idle, pompous, and lazy. The white women are idle and apathetic; and the children are aimless and discouraged. Daddie says slavery is wrong, and no contingency can make it right; but I notice that he does n't propose any remedy."

Prairie schooners were not known as "ships of the desert" then, for Joaquin Miller had not yet sought or acquired fame; and no Huntington or Holladay had made a transcontinental railway track, or tunnelled the sierras of the mighty West to open the way for the iron horse. Even the overland stage was an improvement as yet unknown; for Holladay had not yet established his relay stations, or sent his intrepid drivers out among the savages as heralds of approaching civilization.

"Daddy says humanity's a hog," was the leader in Jean's next entry in her diary. "The weather continued so bad, mother was so wan and weak, and the stock were so nearly starved, that he decided to stop over for a day or two near a farmhouse and barnyard, where there seemed a chance to purchase food for man and beast. But we were glad to move on after a rather brief experience. The farmer doubled the price of his hay and grain every morning after 'worship,' reminding those of us who could not choose but hear his daily dole of advice

to God, of Grandpa Ranger's story of a planter and merchant he knew in his youth, of whom it was said that he would call his slaves to their devotions in the morning with a preamble like this: 'Have you wet the leather? Have you sanded the sugar? Have you put meal in the pepper and chicory in the coffee? Have you watered the whiskey? Then come in to prayers!'

The necessities of these farmers were born of isolation; and the opportunities for barter and dicker with passing emigrants stirred the acquisitive spirit within them into vigorous action. The prices of their hitherto unsalable commodities went up to unheard-of figures, increasing in geometrical progression. But Captain Ranger, having created a market in the remote country places in Illinois for supplies of coffee, tea, calico, and unbleached cotton cloth, had prepared himself at Quincy with such commodities, and was able to adjust his trade somewhat to the law of supply and demand.

Oh, those teamsters of the plains! No jollier crowd of brave, enduring, accommodating men ever cracked cruel whips over the backs of long-enduring oxen, or plodded more patiently than they beside the slowly moving wagons, as, wading often over shoe-tops through the muck and mire of the Missouri roads of early spring-time, they jollied one another and cracked their whips and sang. Each misfit nickname was accepted as a joke, and none of the men inquired as to the origin of his peculiar cognomen. But Hal, being more inquisitive than they, asked troublesome questions of his sisters, who were in the secret.

"Better tell him, girls," said their mother. "He'll be in honor bound to keep the secret then. Won't you, dear?"

"Jean did it," said Marjorie.

"Then suppose you confess," said Hal.

"It was this way," she explained after a pause of

mock seriousness. "The first night we were in camp, after we had washed the dishes, it occurred to me to write each teamster's name and paste it to the bottom of his plate. I did n't know the real name of one of 'em from Adam's, so I wrote them down as Scotty, Limpy, Yank, Shorty, Sawed-off, and so on. We did n't intend to perpetrate a misfit, but a joke, and we struck both. Scotty got the correct title, though it merely happened so. But you just watch 'em! Limpy's as straight as an Indian; Sawed-off stands six feet two in his socks; Lengthy is no taller when he stands up than when he lies down; Yank is a characteristic slave-owner; and Sambo is an ingrained abolitionist!"

"We could n't have made such a lot o' misfits if we had tried a week," said Mary. "But the men all think Hal did it; so the suspicion does n't fall on us; and you get the credit for being somewhat of a wag, Mr. Hal."

"It's nothing new for men or boys to take the credit for what their sisters do," said Jean, as Hal strode away, satisfied that in protecting his sisters from a piece of folly, by accepting it as his own, he was acting the part of a man. "Adam set the example; and where would Herschel have been if he had n't had a sister?"

"Adam might have been in a box if he could n't have had Eve," laughed Marjorie; "for there would then have been nobody to raise Cain."

"Or the Ranger family," added Jean.

Several days of tedious, laborious travel brought the wanderers into an open, sparsely timbered, almost unsettled part of the State of Missouri. The snow and sleet gave way to brighter skies, the roads and sloughs were drying up, and the higher grounds were gradually arraying themselves in robes of green and gold.

"Here is vacant land, and lots of it," said Mary, as she viewed the virgin prospect of a mighty settlement in

undisguised admiration. "This is a beautiful world!" and she sighed deeply, her face toward the rising sun.

"Don't look backward," cried Jean. "Remember Lot's wife."

"There's no use in trying to look backward," urged Hal. "Dad will never halt till he lands us on the western shore of the continent, on the eastern hem of the Pacific Ocean. He says this country's too old for him. The wild turkeys are all killed off, or scared out o' sight; the deer and elk are gone for good; and the country's played out."

"Wait a few years, and there'll be railroads gridironing this whole great valley of the Mississippi," said Jean. "There'll be towns and cities springing up in a hundred places. Farms and orchards and handsome country homes will cover these rolling prairies. The native groves will be more than quadrupled by cultivation, and schoolhouses and churches will spring into existence everywhere."

"I wish you'd talk like this to your father! Won't you, Jean?" asked Mrs. Ranger.

"You could n't hire him to live in a slave State!" cried Jean.

"The Reverend Thomas Rogers might manage to get this far on the way toward the setting sun without much money," smiled Mrs. Ranger, meaningly. "The children favor our stopping here, on Missouri soil," she added, as her husband joined the group. "Don't you think the idea a good one, John?"

"What! And let the word go back among our people at home that we'd flunked? No! I'd die first, and then I would n't do it," exclaimed her husband, petulantly.

Mrs. Ranger burst into tears.

"There, there, Annie! Don't worry. But don't ask me to settle, with my children, in a slave State. Father left Kentucky when I was a boy to get away from slavery and its inevitable accompaniment of poor white trash.

There is an irrepressible conflict between freedom and every form of involuntary servitude that exists under the sun. This nigger business will lead to a bloody war long before Uncle Sam is done with it, and I doubt if even war will settle it."

"But Oregon may come into the Union as a slave State, John. You know that the extension of slavery is the chief theme that is agitating Congress now."

"I'll have a chance to fight the curse in Oregon, Annie. But it is a settled condition here. I'll fight it to the bitter end, if I get a chance!" He strode away to look after the cattle and men.

"Dear, patient mother!" cried Jean, stroking her mother's cheek tenderly. "Your head is as clear as a bell. But there's a whole lot o' common-sense in what daddie says, too. We'll soon have settled weather; then you won't mind travelling. We all think you'll be well and strong as soon as we get settled in Oregon."

"Maybe so, if I could only live to get there," faltered the feeble woman. "But —"

"But what, mother?"

"Nothing. I was only thinking."

Jean's heart sank. "You must get to bed, mother dear," she said lovingly.

The Ranger children, tired out with the fatigue and excitement of the day, were soon locked in the deep sleep of healthy youth and vigor. Not so Mrs. Ranger. The regular breathing of her sleeping loved ones soothed her nerves, but she seemed preternaturally awake.

A gentle breeze stirred the white wagon-hood overhead. Sukie, who was tethered near, neighed gently as Mrs. Ranger spoke her name, and came closer to be stroked.

"Is de Cap'n heah?" asked a dusky figure with a child on its hip, as it edged its way between the mare and the wagon-wheel.

"He's out with the cattle at present. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Hide me, quick! De houn's is aftah me, honey. I've jes' waded de crick, and dey've lost de trail. Quick, missus; an' I'll sarve ye forever!"

The low baying of the bloodhounds proclaimed that they were again on the trail.

"Climb in here! Be quick!" exclaimed Mrs. Ranger, making room for the quaking fugitive. "I've never tried to sleep with a nigger and her baby, but I can stand it if I have to," she said to herself, as the refugee took the place assigned to her.

"What in thunder are you up to now?" asked her husband when he looked in upon his wife and children in the morning and discovered the dusky intruder.

"Trying to help you to circumvent the institution you are so ready to fight, which, as you say, is wrong, and no contingency can make right," replied his wife, her cheeks and eyes aglow with mingled satisfaction and excitement.

IX

THE CAPTAIN DEFENDS THE LAW.

"**D**ON'T you know it's against the laws of your country to harbor a runaway nigger?" asked the Captain, in genuine alarm. "We'll never get off o' Missouri soil in this world if we're caught hiding this wench and her pickaninny among our traps. She's got to get away from here in a hurry."

"So far as the laws go, I don't care a rap, John. I, nor no other woman, ever took a hand in making any of 'em. And as for Missouri soil, it's good enough for anybody. I'm quite enamored of it; and I feel perfectly willing to stay here as long as I live."

"I don't want to make no trouble for nobody, massa," sobbed the fugitive, peeping from her covert like a beast at bay. "De missus done tuk keep o' me 'dout 'siderin' any consikenses. Did n't ye, honey?"

"There was nothing else I could do," said Mrs. Ranger, firmly, though her cheeks blanched with an unspoken fear.

"Dey was goin' to sell me down Souf, an' keep my coon for a body-servant for his own pappy's new bride dat's a-comin' to de plantation nex' week. Wus n't dey, dawlin'?" holding aloft her mulatto offspring, who blinked at the rising sun. "'Fo' God, massa, I won't make a speck o' trouble. I'll jest keep a hidin' till we git across de Missouri Ribbah. Take me 'long to Oregon, an' ye won't nebbah be sorry."

"I've already agreed to take along one widow and her babies," said the Captain, exchanging glances with Jean. "It does n't seem possible to add to the number."

"Jes' le' me ride a hidin' in a wagon till I get across de Missouri Ribbah, massa! I kin take keer o' myself an' my pickaninny too, if you'll turn me loose among de Injuns."

"It is the slaveholding, free American white man that the poor creature's afraid of," said Mrs. Ranger, with a bitter smile.

Again the deep baying of the bloodhounds betokened the finding of the trail.

"Climb back into the wagon, quick," cried the Captain, "and take care that you keep out o' sight! Deluge the wagon-wheel and all around it with water, gals. Don't let the wench put her nose out, Annie. Hang the luck! When it comes to such a pass that a runaway wench would rather trust herself and her brat among the red savages of the plains than among her white owners in a free country, I get ashamed of a white man's government. What's the wench's name?"

"She said it was Dugs."

"The devil!"

"Don't swear, John. She did n't name herself."

"And the name of the coon?"

"Geo'ge Washin't'n, sah. I named him for de faddah o' de kentry. He's as han'some a coon as ebber had a white daddy. Ain't ye, honey?" And the mother held him close. "Yo's a flower o' slavery, ain't ye, dawlin'?" a hidden meaning in her voice.

Again the deep baying of the bloodhounds was heard. But they were taking the back trail. The fugitive laughed.

"De way we larn 'em dat trick is a niggah's secret," she said, as she again hid herself and child.

"My massa did n't use to b'lieve in slavery, missus," she said, as the baying of the dogs grew faint and distant. "When massa first 'herited his slaves, he used to tell us he'd set us free. But he got a habit o' holdin' on to us, an' it jist growed on him. It was like de whiskey habit. It got fastened on him good an' ha'd, and he did n't talk 'bout manumittin' us no mo'. He did n't want to sell me, he said, but I was prope'ty, an' times got bad, an' he was 'bleeged to have money to pay his debts. His new wife's 'spensive, awful, an' he had to sell some o' de niggahs. If he'd sol' me an' Geo'dy Wah too, I would n't 'a' runned away. But when he said he'd sell me, an' keep my coon to be his new wife's niggah, I could n't stan' it nohow, so I scooted!" and the negress laughed heartily.

"Do you think you can hide her for a week, Annie? We'll be across the Missouri River by that time."

"I'll do my best, John. We're running a terrible risk, though. Sometimes, when I think of the sins of this so-called free government, all committed in the name of Liberty, I long to turn rebel, and do my best to destroy it, root and branch."

"I had a husban' once, suh. But massa tuk a liken' to me, so he sol' him down Souf," said the fugitive.

"And this baby?"

"Is my massa's own coon. Massa would n't 'a' sol' him nohow."

"Be quick!" cried Jean, her breath hot with indignation. "Hide yourself! You must n't let the teamsters see you here. They're coming in with the cattle now."

"Gimme some quilts an' blankets, honey. Dah! Hol' 'em up, so! Now lemme make an Injun wickiup in one end o' dis yah wagon. Geo'ge Washin't'n 'll be still as a lamb. Won't ye, my putty 'ittle yallow coon?"

The baby, with its tawny skin, blue eyes, and blackish-brown, tangled curls, looked elfish as he nestled close to his mother's breast and gazed affrighted into her turban-shaded eyes.

"Sh-sh-sh!" cried Jean; "the men are almost here. Keep close to your den and be very quiet."

Day after day passed wearily along; but if the teamsters suspected aught, they made no sign. And day after day the teams wended their way westward without betraying the commission of this crime against the commonwealth of the great new State of Missouri and the free government of the United States of America, which it would have been base flattery to call a misdemeanor; as its perpetrators would have learned to their cost if they had been caught in the act.

"You don't seem as happy as formerly," said Captain Ranger to his wife at the close of a long and trying day. "If the risk we're running by harboring that runaway nigger is making you uneasy, we can turn her out. A man's first duty is to his own flesh and blood."

"It is n't that, John. The woman is no trouble; and her baby's so afraid of bloodhounds that she keeps him as quiet as a mouse. I'm willing to risk my life to get them both away from their white owners and out into

the Indians' country, where they may have at least comparative freedom. I am not afraid."

"Then what is the matter, dear?"

She toyed caressingly with his hair and beard, but said nothing. They were seated on a log by the roadside, and a laughing rivulet sprawled at their feet.

"Speak, Annie; don't hesitate. I can hear your heart beat. What's the matter?"

"You remember my little farm, John? It's only ten acres, you know."

"Yes; what of it?"

"You won't be angry, John?"

"Of course not. What about it?"

"I want to deed the place over to my mother before we leave the State o' Missouri."

His manner changed instantly.

"I thought that matter was settled," he said tersely.

"Can't you let me have a little peace?"

"I have held my peace as long as my conscience will let me, dear. You did n't settle anything about it. You merely put me off, you know."

"Well?"

A man can put a world of meaning into a monosyllable sometimes.

"I want you to let-me deed that piece of property to my mother. If the deed were made to my father, and she should outlive him, she'd be only allowed to occupy it free from rent for one year after his death; but if it is made hers absolutely, and he should outlive her, he'll be allowed to have a home and get his living off it as long as he lives. You see, it makes a difference whether it is a cow or an ox that is gored," and she smiled grimly.

"The women are all getting their heads turned over the question of property," said Captain Ranger to himself as he watched the rivulet playing at his feet.

"Jean's been putting this into your head, Annie," he said after a painful silence.

"The child has a strong sense of justice, inherited from you, John. You know she is wonderfully like you."

"Yes, yes, Annie. I wish she had been a boy instead o' Hal. She'd have made a rackin' good lawyer."

"I'll admit that she advised me to urge you to make the deed, John."

"Very well; we'll see about it sometime, Annie" and he arose to go.

Mrs. Ranger's heart sank.

"Why is it that men who are proverbially just and upright in their dealings with their fellow-men are so often derelict in duty where women, especially their own wives, are concerned?" she asked herself as she tottered by his side in silence.

The next morning found her unable to rise. A racking cough, which had disturbed her all through the night, was followed at daybreak by a burning fever. Her husband, who had slept like a top in an adjoining tent, was startled when he saw the ravages the night had left upon her pinched, white face.

"You caught cold last night, darling," he said, as he prescribed a simple remedy. "You ought not to have been sitting out in the night air."

"That did n't hurt me, John."

"Then it is the apprehension you suffer on account o' that wench that is making you sick."

"No, John; it is n't that at all."

"Then what is it?"

"Ask Jean. I have nothing more to say."

But there was no time for further parleying. The breakfast was ready, and the hurry of preparation for departure was the theme of the hour.

"We reached camp in a pouring rain last night and pitched our tents, amid much discomfort, on the outskirts of the little town of St. Joseph," wrote Jean on

the morning of the fifth of May. "But I have n't much time for you, my journal, for there are other things to claim attention," and she shut the book with the usual impatient bang.

"Got any blank deeds along with you, daddie?" she asked, after it was announced that they were to be ready to break camp the next morning.

"Yes; why?"

"Because we must have that deed of Grandma Robinson's all ready for mother to acknowledge before a notary in the morning, as we go through town on our way to the ferry."

"Your mother is n't able to attend to any business."

"She is n't able to put it off, daddie dear."

"Very well; I'll see about it."

"But I want the blank form now, so I can have it all ready when we go through town. Mother has the original deed, and I can easily duplicate it. I'll search for a blank among your papers, if you don't object."

"You have no idea how this little act of justice will help mother to regain her health," said Mary. "She's been haunted by a fear that you'd put it off till it would be too late."

Captain Ranger did not reply; but his silence was considered as consent, and Jean hurried away to prepare the deed.

"I've been dreaming about an island somewhere in mid-ocean," said Marjorie, "where women could hold their own earnings, just as men do in the United States; where they had full liberty to help the men to make the laws, for which they paid their full quota of taxes, just as the women do in Missouri and Illinois and, for aught I know, in Oregon."

"I've paid the taxes on that ten-acre farm for a dozen years," said her father.

"Yes, out of mother's income from it," retorted Marjorie. "It has always been rented, you know."

The subject was dropped for the nonce, though John Ranger did not feel wholly at ease, he hardly realized why. But the next day, as the train was moving through the principal street on its way to the river-front, he stopped his team hard by a notary's office and tenderly assisted his wife to alight. Here, with her thin and trembling fingers, Annie Ranger affixed her signature to her last earthly deed of conveyance, her eyes beaming with joy.

"Are you satisfied now?" asked her husband, as he lifted her to her seat in the wagon, where she watched Harry rushing away to the post-office with a big envelope containing the precious deed.

"Yes, dear; and I am so glad I did n't have to make my mark! When I get to Oregon, I'll manage somehow to earn the money to pay you what I owe on my taxes, John."

"Don't speak of that," her husband exclaimed, feeling half ashamed of himself, for a reason he did not divine.

"Then you'll never try to hold those old tax receipts as a lien on the property?"

"Nonsense, Annie! Do you think I'm a brute beast?"

"No, darling. I would to God all men were as good as you are, my own dear, precious husband."

They were nearing the Missouri River now, and in the rush that ensued, the family had no opportunity for further exchange of confidences for many hours.

"Look!" cried Marjorie, after the last loaded wagon had been crowded on to the big ferry-boat, and they had started to a point several miles up the river to make a landing on the opposite bank. "There's a posse of officers. They're after Dugs, I know they are, 'cause they've got bloodhounds with 'em, and they're signalling the boat to stop and come back."

"She can't do it," said the captain of the ferry, after a hurried conference with the captain of the train, as he

suspiciously thrust his closed hand into the breeches pocket over his hip.

"You can come out of hiding now, Sally O'Dowd," exclaimed Captain Ranger, as soon as the last team was safely up the opposite bank.

"I thought it was Dugs they were after," said Mary.

"So 't was; and me too," cried the grass widow, as she jumped to the ground, surrounded by her three children. "Sam O'Dowd was one o' the posse. I saw him. He could n't have taken me; but he was after my babies." She hugged her children, as she laughed and wept by turns in a transport of joy.

"Don't cry, Sally," said the Captain, coaxingly. "You're in the Indian country, safe and sound."

"Before Sam can get a requisition from the Governor of Illinois to reclaim your babies, and before the Governor o' Missouri can give that party o' slave-catchers the power to arrest Dugs and her coon, we'll have you out under the protection of the Indians!" said Mrs. Ranger, with a meaning smile.

X

THE CAPTAIN MAKES A DISTINCTION

"I THOUGHT it was arranged that Sally was to join us at Quincy, on the Mississippi," said Captain Ranger, after they were safely landed in the Indians' territory.

"That was the agreement between Jean and myself," interposed the frightened fugitive, still holding her babies close; "but I overheard a conversation at St. Louis that changed my plans. I was in hiding, down among the wharf-rats and niggers on the river-bank, in a cheap hash-house, half scow and half log cabin. The walls

were thin, and I could n't sleep much, so I heard most everything that was going on, out o' doors and in. And one night by the help of the good Lord I overheard a voice that I knew was Sam's. He was telling a pal that he was hunting his runaway wife. He said she had stolen his babies, and he meant to get 'em, dead or alive."

"I thought you'd led him off on an altogether different scent," exclaimed Jean.

"So did I. But it appears that his mother got on the scent somehow, and betrayed me. I don't know why she did it, for she was over-anxious to be rid of the children. But I suppose she was moved by an impulse of spite or revenge. I heard Sam say he'd overhaul us at Quincy, so I had good reason to change my route."

"You had a close call, Mrs. O'Dowd!" exclaimed the Captain, earnestly. "I don't know as he could have put me in limbo for harboring you, but he could have made it go hard with me for hiding the children. I hate a law-breaker; but what is a fellow to do in such a case?"

"God has been merciful to me, Squire. I felt all along that I would get away safe and sound."

"Would n't God have done a better job to have saved you in the first place?" asked the Captain, dryly.

"How did you get money to pay your travelling expenses?" asked Mary.

"I've a confession to make to you and Mrs. Ranger, Captain. Will you promise not to scold?"

"I'll know better what to promise after I've learned the provocation. Don't be afraid to tell the truth. Speak out. Don't mind the gals."

"I stole three hundred dollars — it was my own money — from Mother O'Dowd," she whispered. "It did n't seem so very wicked. She got my home without any equivalent, you know."

"Oh, Sally! How could you?" asked Mrs. Ranger, her cheeks blanching.

"Do you think it was wicked to take my own money and my own children, when I had the opportunity?"

"It was a theft, certainly, under the law; and it is always wrong to steal," retorted Mrs. Ranger.

"We must uphold the majesty of the law, if necessary, at the muzzle of our guns!" said the Captain, loftily.

"How about Dugs and her coon?" asked Jean, with a silvery laugh.

"That was different. Slavery, as I have often said before, is wrong, and no contingency can make it right."

"You are making a distinction where there is no perceptible difference, except in the matter of complexion," exclaimed Mrs. Ranger.

"Did Dugs, the slave, have money?" asked Mrs. O'Dowd.

"Dugs has n't taken me into her confidence," said the Captain. "What in creation are we to do with you all?"

"There 'll be a way, John; don't worry," said his wife. "'Trust in the Lord and do good, and verily thou shalt be fed.'"

"Do you know," said Sally, turning to the Captain, "that the pretty little blonde in black, whom I see over yonder, is a jewel? I met her on the street this morning, on her way to the ferry, with her mother and her carriage and wagons and drivers. I was getting desperate with the fear that I could n't overtake you; and I knew there was no time to be lost. So I told her my story. I may have exaggerated somewhat, for I told her you had agreed to take me and the babies to Oregon. I said I had been detained (which was true) and I must overtake you before you crossed the river. She did n't wait to ask a question, but bundled us all into her carriage without a word."

"Did n't I tell you you could trust my daddie?" asked Jean, aside. "He's a whole lot better than he thinks he is."

"Father thinks he is a stickler for the law," said Mary, with a chuckle.

Indians came and went in great numbers around and into the company's first night's camp on the plains, sometimes growing insolent in their persistent demands for food and articles of clothing, but on the whole peaceable and friendly. Every man, woman, and child was under orders to give them no cause for offence, the Captain hoping, by example, to disarm hostility. But he soon learned that this liberal policy brought hordes of beggars; and the necessity of carefully guarding their freight was made apparent the next morning, when they found their breakfast supplies had been stolen, and with them the cooking utensils. The Captain found it necessary to send a messenger back to St. Joseph to purchase fresh supplies before they could go on.

The next day's drive over the beautiful prairie was without unusual incident. The roads were good, the soil rich, and the undulating landscape perfect.

"Lengthy and Sawed-off are bringing in a buffalo," cried Hal.

"We had one yesterday," said Mrs. Ranger. "The game ought not to be slaughtered in this wasteful manner. You ought to stop it, John."

"Men are still in a state of savagery," replied her husband.

"The instinct to kill is as strong in us as it was in the days of Agamemnon," said Scotty.

"Or the Cæsars," exclaimed the little widow.

"We'll need this meat for food before we get to Oregon," said Mrs. Ranger, surveying the huge carcass of the fallen monarch thoughtfully. "We must cut the flesh into strips and dry it, Indian fashion, in the sun."

"But we can't stop to dry it, Annie," exclaimed her husband.

"We need n't stop, John. We can get the men to cut

it into strips while in camp. Here is a ball of strong cord. We can string the strips of meat on the cord and festoon it along the outsides of the wagon covers."

"A woman is a born provider," exclaimed Scotty. "We men may take to ourselves the credit for the care of women and children, but we'd soon be on the road to starvation if it were not for the protecting care of the mother sex, to help us out."

Mrs. Ranger, pleased with the praises of her family and the teamster, sank back on her pillows and slept fitfully.

"It pays a mother to rear a family of loyal children," said Mrs. O'Dowd to Mrs. McAlpin, with whom she had become quite intimate. "I'd rather be an honored mother, like Mrs. Ranger, than be a Queen Elizabeth or a Madame de Staël."

"I believe I'll reconnoitre a little, Annie, if you don't mind," said the Captain, after the camp was still. "I'd like to study the lay o' the land from the adjacent heights. You won't miss me?"

"No, John. Or, I mean, I won't mind it. You must learn, sooner or later, to depend upon yourself for company, my dear. And you'd better practise a little beforehand."

"What do you mean, Annie?"

"Can't you see that I'll not be able to finish this journey, John?"

"Nonsense, Annie! Just be patient till we get to Oregon. I mean to build you a pretty room, away from the noise of the household, where you'll enjoy the fruits of your labors. I've hired Dugs to be your body-servant during the remainder of your days."

"I'll change her name, John. I'll have nobody around me that answers to the name of Dugs. It is n't a good name for a dog."

"What'll you call her?"

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"Susannah."

"What if she objects?"

"She's already agreed to the change, if it suits you and the girls."

John Ranger laughed.

"So-long!" he cried, and galloped away to a point overlooking a bend in the river, where he loosened the reins and allowed the mare to nibble the tender herbage, which, tempted by the sunshine, was clothing the moist earth in a covering of grass and buttercups.

"O life," he cried, "what a mystery you are! How puny, yet how mighty! The living rain comes down in silent majesty upon the sleeping earth; the living sunshine melts the ice and snow; and the living earth, awakening from her season of hibernation, answers back to rain and sun with a power of reproduction that defies the mighty law of gravitation, and sends outward and up toward the living sky the living vegetation that sustains the living man. O sky, all a-twinkle with your myriads of stars, how inscrutable you are in your infinitude! And how like a worm of the dust is man, who has no power to hold in the precious body of even the woman he loves the mystery of existence, of which Creation is the only master!"

Below him, so far away that it gleamed like a silver ribbon in the starlight, ran the muddy Missouri, carrying in its turbid waves the *débris* of the Mandan district, and bearing on its troubled breast the throng of river craft at whose little windows hundreds of lights were twinkling, like diamonds on parade. Beyond gleamed the moving steamers and their accompanying hosts of lesser boats, now nestling close to the water's edge, and now climbing in irregular fashion toward the uplands at the town of St. Joseph; and, far beyond, his mental eyes beheld the homes of his own and his Annie's beloved parents.

"I do wonder if it is really wrong for me to leave them

in their old age, and take Annie away also," he said to himself, half audibly, as he continued his gaze over the dim expanse of silence that surrounded him on every hand.

There was no answer. He gave Sukie the rein and bowed his head upon his hands, and wept. How long he remained alone, absorbed in the mingled emotions that possessed him, he did not know. He took no note of time, and Sukie moved leisurely over the plain, daintily cropping the tender grass.

"I was ambitious, selfish, and exacting," he exclaimed at last, as a sharp gust of wind slapped him in the face. "Annie does n't complain; but she is fading from my sight. It is all my fault. If she could be happy, she would soon be well. I wonder if I ought not to take her back to her father and mother and her childhood's home. Everybody would laugh; but what should I care? Are not the life and happiness of my wife worth more to me than all the world's approval?" Then, after a long silence, he tightened the reins and said: "Come, Sukie; let's go back to camp. Right or wrong, I must go ahead. I've burned my bridges behind me."

As he expected, Scotty was found sitting in the midst of an audience at Mrs. McAlpin's camp-fire. He was discoursing on his travels in Egypt, and had collected about him quite a crowd.

"The earth is old, very, very old," the teamster was saying. He arose to make room for Captain Ranger, as he passed the reins to Jean, who, with Mary and Marjorie, had been an enraptured listener. "The comparative topography of Central America and northern Africa excites the liveliest speculation. When I was in Darien, I found many features among the ruins abounding in the jungles of the isthmus, strikingly similar to those one sees in the land of the Pyramids. True, the analogy is not always apparent, because the almost total absence of rain in Egypt is exchanged for an almost total

lack of dry skies in Panama and Yucatan. Science scoffs at my assumptions, because I cannot prove them; but I'd bet a million if I had it, and wait for the fact to be proven — as it surely will be some day — that there was once a continuous continent between the homes of the early Pharaohs and those of a prehistoric people who inhabited the two Americas."

"I've often reached a similar conclusion myself when visiting the prehistoric scenes of both hemispheres," said Mrs. McAlpin. "Sometime, not so very remote in the history of the planet, there must have been a sudden and awful cataclysm, such as might result from a change in the inclination of the earth's axis, of which history can as yet give no authentic account."

"Then the fabled Atlantis may not be so much of a fable, after all," exclaimed Mary.

"Do you suppose any of you know what you are talking about?" asked Captain Ranger.

"The world has scarcely yet begun to read the testimony of the air, the earth, the water, and the rocks, — especially of this Western Continent," said Scotty, with a respectful bow to his captain.

"That's true," remarked Mrs. McAlpin, rising to end the interview. "Travel in any direction broadens and enlightens anybody who has eyes to see or ears to hear."

"Or a soul to think," echoed Jean.

"Say, Scotty, have you watered your steers?" asked Captain Ranger, in a sarcastic tone.

"By Jove! I forgot. Good-evening, ladies!" The teamster turned away, crestfallen.

"Excuse me, madam; I did n't intend to be rude," said the Captain, as he paused to say good-night; "but we've embarked on a journey in which theories must be set aside for duties sometimes, — that is, if we're ever to see Oregon."

XI

MRS. McALPIN SEEKS ADVICE

THE next forenoon Captain Ranger rode up alongside the carriage of Mrs. McAlpin and her mother, in which Jean was posing as driver and guest, and said: "I hope I gave you no offence in speaking as I did to Mr. Burns last night."

"No offence at all, Captain. Don't mention it; you were simply discharging your duty. But" — and Mrs. McAlpin hesitated a little — "would you mind exchanging your mount with Jean for a little while? I am quite sure she will enjoy a canter on the back of Sukie, and I wish to counsel with you a little. I am sorry to impose upon your good nature."

Mrs. Benson took little notice of the Captain or of her daughter, but leaned back on the cushions, apparently absorbed in a book.

"I want your candid opinion," said Mrs. McAlpin. "Do you consider the marriage ceremony infallible? Is it an unpardonable sin to break it, except for a nameless reason? I have an object in asking this question that is not born of mere curiosity."

"Nothing of human origin is infallible, madam; and, for aught I can see to the contrary, nothing is infallible anywhere."

"Do you believe it is better to break a bad bargain than to keep it?"

"That depends upon circumstances."

"Why do you evade my question?"

"Because I can't see what you're driving at."

"Then I'll come at once to the point. Suppose you had been born a woman?"

"That is n't a supposable case."

"But we'll let it rest for the present as if it were. Suppose you were born to be a woman, — we'll put it that way for the sake of illustration, — and suppose, while you were yet a child, you had been married to a man many years your senior — married just to please somebody else — in defiance of your own judgment or desires?"

"Millions of women are married in that way every year, madam. Look at India, at China, at Turkey, and at many modern homes, even in England and America! It would seem to be the exception and not the rule where women get the husbands of their choice. I know it is the fashion to pretend they do; for a woman has to become desperately weary of her bargain before she'll own up honestly to a matrimonial mistake."

"But suppose one of those women had been yourself; don't you think if you had been so married in childhood, that you would have rebelled openly as soon as you reached the years of discretion?"

"Nonsense, Daphne!" interrupted Mrs. Benson. "You harp forever on a single string. Suppose you discuss the weather, for a change."

"There are points on which my estimable mother and myself do not agree," said the daughter, with a sad smile. "Don't mind her, please. I have learned that you are a wise and just man, and I am in need of advice. What would you do if, although you had obeyed the letter of the human law, you knew in your own soul that your marriage was a sin?"

"Don't talk like that in my presence, Daphne! I cannot bear it!" exclaimed her mother, petulantly.

"When I left the States I hoped to get away from everybody's domestic troubles," said the Captain, earnestly. "Please don't tell me about yours — if you have any — unless it is in my power to assist you."

They had reached a narrow and rocky grade, where careful driving was necessary to avoid disaster.

"We must turn aside here, ladies," the Captain exclaimed suddenly, as he dexterously alighted and guided the horses by the bits to the only point of advantage in sight. "Cattle and horses ought never to be compelled to travel together. You can't hurry a steer except in a stampede, and then Old Nick himself could n't stop him."

"They remind me of more than one pair of mismated bipeds I have met," said Mrs. McAlpin.

The Captain stood at the horses' heads till the last of the jolting and complaining wagons had safely passed the perilous bit of roadway. Then, guiding the team back to the road, he resumed his seat in the carriage, his lips compressed like a trap.

"Don't you think Mr. Burns is a wonderful man?" asked Mrs. McAlpin, in a desperate effort to rekindle a conversation.

"He's a fellow of considerable genius in some ways, but a mighty poor ox-driver."

"He reminds me of many a woman I have seen," continued Mrs. McAlpin, "who has failed to get fitted into her proper niche. His mind is n't fitted to his work. I have seen women chained by circumstances to the kitchen sink, the wash-tub, the churn-dash, and the ironing-board, who never could make a success of any one of these lines of effort, though they might have made excellent astronomers, first-class architects, capable lawyers, good preachers, capital teachers, or splendid financiers. It is a pity to spoil a natural statesman or stateswoman to make a poor ox-driver or an indifferent housekeeper."

"You seem to take great interest in Scotty," remarked the Captain.

"I do. We have travelled extensively through the same lands, though we had never met until our orbits chanced to coincide on this journey. He has a retentive memory, a wide experience, and a keen appreciation of the beautiful, both in nature and art, and so have I. He

is as much out of place as an ox-driver as I should be in a cotton-field. He's a perfect mine of information, though, about a lot of things."

"Then why not take counsel of him, instead of me?"

"He would hardly be a disinterested adviser."

"Ah, I see!"

Mrs. McAlpin blushed. "He has not spoken to me one word of love, Captain, — if that is what you mean. I am not an eligible party," and the lady used her handkerchief to wipe away a tear. "I want your opinion about getting a divorce from a union that I detested long before I ever met Mr. Burns. It is unbearable now."

"Hush, Daphne! Not another word," interposed her mother. "Strangers have no right to an insight into our family affairs."

"But I must speak to somebody. Stay, Captain!" laying her hand upon his arm as he was about to leave the carriage.

"Are you running away from your husband, madam?" he asked, resuming his seat.

"You guess correctly, sir."

"I suspected it all along; but it was none of my business in the beginning, nor is it now. But I confess that it looks as if I were making it my business to conduct a caravan of grass widows to Oregon, judging from the present aspect of affairs."

"To make a long story short, — for I see you are growing restless, — I was married in my callow childhood, married in obedience to my mother's wish. She was a widow and poor; my suitor was accomplished and rich. If he'd been a sensible man he would have courted and married my mother, who adores him. But old men are such idiots! They're always hunting young women, or children, for wives."

"You're complimentary."

"Beg your pardon; present company is always excepted. They imagine that young and silly girls will make happy and contented wives, — when any person not overcome by vanity knows that no young man or young woman can be truly enamored of anybody that's in the sere and yellow leaf. What would you think of a woman of mamma's age, for instance, making love to a boy? And if such a boy should consent to marry her, who believes that he would be content with his bargain after his beard was grown?"

"Ask me something easy," said the Captain.

"My father was a physician; and it was my childhood's delight to study his books, attend his clinics, and make myself generally useful among his patients. I never dreamed of surrendering my person, my liberty, my will, and the absolute control of my individuality to the commands of any human being on earth except myself, till after the deed was done for me by another. No wonder I rebelled when I reached the years of maturity and discretion."

"Mr. McAlpin was a good man and a gentleman, Captain Ranger," interrupted Mrs. Benson.

"Yes, mamma; he was always 'good.' He never whipped his wife; he gave her everything that money could buy. There is no reason that the law can recognize for me to be dissatisfied. But I don't belong primarily to myself, and I don't like it. Mamma here, with her ideas of woman's place in life, would have made him an excellent and happy wife."

"He was always a gentleman, Daphne," repeated her mother. "Don't do him an injustice."

"Yes; and I was his personal and private property. I was a beautiful animal, as he thought, to bedeck with his trinkets and show off his wealth; but I was nobody on my own account. I was simply his echo, — or supposed to be, — and nothing else."

"Daphne, you forget that this carriage, these horses,

our wagons and oxen, and the supplies for this journey are all the product of his bounty."

"They are the product of my jewels, Captain. This outfit is mine; it was bought with my own heart's blood! I owe nothing to Donald McAlpin."

"Do you think you have dealt justly by your husband?" asked the Captain. There was reproof and impatience in his tone.

"I owe him nothing, sir. I am in the same line with Dugs, — a runaway chattel. That is all."

"But Dugs, whose name now is Susannah, did not enter into her bargain voluntarily."

"Neither did I. My mother made the bargain."

"How did you escape, Mrs. McAlpin? And why did you undertake this journey?"

"Mr. McAlpin was called away to England last year, to inherit an additional estate. Mamma was too ill to go, so I stayed to nurse her. I had been his body vassal for four years, and was at last a woman grown. One taste of liberty was enough. I will never be his vassal again. I decided to make this very unusual journey to elude pursuit. He'd not think of searching for me outside of the United States or Canada; least of all in the Great American Desert, whither we are bound. I mean to lose myself for good and all in Oregon."

"And so now you are seeking a divorce?"

"Yes, sir; that is, when I reach Oregon."

"Thousands of other women have borne far worse conjugal conditions all their lives, and died, making no outward sign, Mrs. McAlpin. Men also have their full share of these afflictions, which they bear in silence to the bitter end."

"That is their own affair, sir. If other people choose to wear a ball and chain through life, that is their privilege. I would not do their choosing for them if I could."

"What course would you pursue if you had children?"

"Then I suppose I should be compelled to die with my feet in the stocks. Children might have diverted my mind and helped to save my sanity, though. I've prayed for them without ceasing, but in vain. I'm going to a remote country, — a new country, where new environments make newer and more plastic conditions. The laws of men, one-sided as they are, will divorce me after seven years."

"And what is Scotty going to do during all this time?"

"If he loves me as he thinks he does, he'll wait. If it's only a passing fancy, he'll get over it in time. I will not permit his attentions now, nor until Donald McAlpin divorces me and gets another wife."

Captain Ranger's union with the gentle bride of his choice had been so natural, and their lives together had been so harmonious, despite their many cares and sorrows, that neither of them had ever harbored a thought of living apart from the other. Differences of opinion they had sometimes, and now and then a brief, angry dispute, but the end was always peace; and he remembered now, with a pang of self-reproach, that in all such encounters he, whether right or wrong, had invariably gained his point.

"You are my guiding star, my faithful wife," he whispered, as he gently assisted her from the wagon after they had halted for the night. "Come with me, dear, and get some exercise, while Sally and Susannah help the other girls to get supper."

"I don't see why we might n't end our journey here, John," said his wife, as they gazed abroad over the vast expanse of table-land that stretched away on every side, intersected here and there, with streams, their courses marked by stately rows of cottonwood just bursting into leaf, their bases hedged with pussy-willows. "Here are land and wood and water as good as any we passed

yesterday. This surely will be a rich and thickly settled country some day."

"But it is all Indian country, my dear. I wish you would talk about something else."

They returned to the camp in silence.

"I wish the girls were as tractable as you are, Annie," he said an hour later, after having had a heated dispute with his daughters over some trifling disagreement. "They are as headstrong as mules."

"Being girls, they take after you, John," replied his wife, with a smile. "I'm afraid their husbands won't find them as tractable as I have been."

"Bring on more of your flapjacks and bacon, Miss Mary," cried Scotty, as Mary poised a big pile of the steaming cakes over the heads of the hungry men who knelt at the mess-boxes.

"You seem to be regaining your lost appetite," exclaimed Sawed-off. "Have you and the widder cried quits?"

"That's our business," was the curt reply.

It was late when Mary sought her mother's couch for a brief visit that night. She was weeping silently, and her mother caressed her tenderly. "I know your heart is troubled, darling," said Mrs. Ranger, "but do not be discouraged. Be of good cheer. Every cloud has a silver lining." And Mary's heart was comforted, though her reason could not tell her why.

XII

JEAN BECOMES A WITNESS

"**H**OW's your journal getting on, Jean?" asked her father, one evening, after all was still in camp.

Mrs. Ranger had been unusually nervous and timid all day, and Susannah had been in constant attendance upon the wagon-bed full of little ones, — seven in all, — who had been more than usually unruly, fretful, and quarrelsome.

Jean looked ruefully at her father. "The pesky thing is n't getting along at all!" she exclaimed. "There's nothing to inspire one to write. There's no grass for the cattle, no wood for the fires, and no comfort anywhere."

"Then write up the facts. Don't allow yourself to get morbid. Don't be so listless and lackadaisical."

It was now the twentieth of May; and under this date, in restive obedience to her father's command, Jean began her entries again: —

"We came about eighteen miles to-day. And such a day! It has been drizzly, disagreeable, and cold from morning till night, with no cheery prospects ahead. We hear of an epidemic of measles having broken out on the road, endangering much life among children and such grown folks as did n't have sense enough to get the disgusting disease before they left their mothers' apron-strings. We passed several newly made graves by the roadside to-day, — a melancholy fact which interested mother deeply.

"Indians, for some reason, are keeping out of our sight. As we are right in the midst of the summer

haunts of many tribes, we are shunned, possibly on account of the contagious diseases among the whites, which are said to kill off Indians as the Asiatic plague kills Europeans. Our company has escaped the epidemic so far; so there is one blessing for which we may be thankful.

"We forded a stream to-day, called the Little Sandy, in the midst of a driving rainstorm, and are now encamped in a deep, dry gulch; that is, we call it dry, because the water runs away nearly as fast as it falls. There is a fine spring on the hillside; and some green cottonwood which we found at the head of the gulch is being slowly coaxed into the semblance of a fire.

"May 21. The skies cleared this morning, and we have found some good grazing for the poor, half-famished stock. We haven't travelled over a dozen miles, but we must stop and give the animals a feed. We have passed extensive beds of iron ore to-day, outcroppings of which are seen in every direction.

"May 22. We yoked up early this morning and came three miles, to the banks of the Big Sandy. The day is clear, but the roads are still muddy after the rain. The early morning was dark and foggy, the air was raw and cold, and the outlook was cheerless in the extreme. Some of the horses in a neighbor's outfit stampeded, and it has taken nearly the whole day to recapture them.

"May 23. We hear rumors of Indian raids ahead of us, and mother is much alarmed. We must not stop for Sunday, but must hurry on to get past the danger-point. If the Indians knew how defenceless we really are, they would rout the camp before morning.

"The sluggish waters of the Big Sandy are swarming with larvæ. Daddie says it's lucky they're not mosquitoes yet; but the trains coming along a week hence will be terribly annoyed by the intruders, who are now unable to molest us.

"May 24. We are following the Little Blue, — a muddy stream about a hundred feet in width.

"May 25. We met to-day a long train of heavily loaded wagons coming from Fort Laramie with great mountains of buffalo robes. At this rate, the buffalo will all be killed off in a very few years. The frightened creatures are now so wild that it is next to impossible to get a shot at one of them; and the antelope are even more timid. Why is man such a destructive animal, I wonder?

"The men driving the freight-teams we met were a mixed-up lot of Indians, Spaniards, and French and Indian half-breeds. Their speech was to us an unintelligible jargon in everything but its profanity, which was English, straight. There was one white man in the crowd, or maybe two of them. They were on horseback, and kept aloof from the common herd. A peculiar apprehension overcame me as I gazed at one of these strangers. He was large, bronzed, and portly, and sat his horse like a centaur; or perhaps I should come nearer the truth if I said like an Englishman. My heart beat a strange tattoo as I watched him. Somehow, it seemed to me that he was in some way concerned with some of our company. I did not understand the feeling, but it was n't comfortable."

"There, daddie!" she cried, exhibiting the written pages. "Don't say I'm neglecting my journal now!"

The twilight had deepened. Below the camp ran a deep ravine, at the base of which a little brook sang merrily. Clumps of cottonwood, badly crippled by wayfarers' axes, struggled for existence here and there. In her haste to reach the covert of the bushes unobserved, Jean ran diagonally over a settlement of prairie dogs, near which the campers had inadvertently pitched their tents. The Lilliputian municipality was evidently well disciplined, for at the sound of approaching footsteps the same sharp, staccato bark, of mingled warning and

authority, that had for an instant startled the foremost team at camping-time, was heard, and every little rodent dropped instantly out of sight. Profound silence fell at once upon the little city, which had before been a bedlam of voices.

Jean reached the foot of the ravine and stopped to listen, her heart beating hard. "I am sure Sally made an appointment to meet somebody in this ravine to-night," she said to herself, "and I'm just as sure she'll need a friend. Women are such fools where men are concerned." She heard the sound of human voices, and pressed her hand hard over her heart.

"I know you think you're safe from arrest," said a voice she knew to be Sally O'Dowd's. "As your wife, I may not be able to give legal testimony that will send you to the gallows; but you're not beyond the pale of lynch law."

A mocking laugh was the only audible response.

"I have n't even told the Squire," resumed the woman's voice. "Nobody knows about it but you and me and the unseen messengers of God."

Again that mocking, brutal laugh, followed by oaths, with words of commingled anger and exultation. Jean held her breath.

"S'posing you could testify, — which you can't, for that divorce is tied up on appeal, — my oath would be as binding as yours, Mrs. O'Dowd. And I would swear to God that it was you did the deed. It would be easy enough to make any court believe my story, for it was common talk that you rebelled all the time against such a litter of babies."

"O God, have mercy!"

"Nobody saw me kill the brat but you, Sally. It would have been bad enough if the young ones had come one at a time, being only a year apart; but when it came to two pairs of twins inside o' thirteen months, it was time to call a halt."

"Are you never to have any mercy on me, Sam?"

"Come back to me as my lawful wife, and you'll see. I'll be easy enough to get along with if you'll treat me right."

The wife was struck dumb with astonishment.

"Come back to me, darling!" The mocking tone gave way to one of cooing tenderness. Jean saw his dusky figure through the shadows. "You see you're in my power, Sally. Better make a virtue of necessity. You can coax the Squire to let me join his train. I will even be a teamster, if necessary, for your sake and the children's."

"What?" cried the woman, in sincere alarm. "Could I be your wife after I've seen you kill one of our children before my very eyes? No, no! Go your way, and let me go mine in peace. If you will leave me and the three surviving babies alone, I'll never tell anybody about the murder. I swear it!"

Again that brutal laugh.

"Do your worst, Sally O'Dowd! You can't prove that I killed the brat. You have n't any witness."

"I have the silent witness of my own conscience; and so have you, Sam O'Dowd. Do you think that I am such an idiot as to come out here to meet you alone?"

"She knows he's a coward," thought Jean, "and she's bluffing."

"Now see here, Sally! You love me; you know you do; you've told me so a thousand times."

"I did love you once, Sam; but that was so long ago that it seems like a far-off dream. I despise, I loathe, I abhor you now!"

"Then this'll settle it. I'll go to the Squire and tell him we've buried the hatchet, and I'm going with you to Oregon. I don't care a rap whether you hate me or not. But if you give me any trouble, I'll swear that you did that killing."

"Oh, help me, pitying Christ!" wailed the unhappy woman. "Is there, in all this world, no Canada to which a fugitive wife may flee, and no underground railroad by which to reach it?"

Again arose that brutal laugh upon the air. The belated bird in the bushes cooed to its mate, and the prairie dogs chattered in the distance.

"Don't be afraid of him, Sally," cried a clear voice from the depths of the cottonwoods. "A tyrant is always a coward. I heard your confession, Sam O'Dowd; and as I am not your wife, I can be a witness."

There was no more brutal laughter. A horse stood picketed and stamping at the head of the gulch, and the murderer hurried toward it with heavy strides. Jean listened with eager attention till he mounted and rode rapidly away.

"Are you still there, Sally?" she asked, as the hoofbeats died away in the distance.

"Yes, Jean; but where are you, and why are you here?"

"The Holy Spirit guided me, I reckon. I was just possessed to come. I did n't know I was following you, or why I came; but I just did it 'cause I had to."

"It was hazardous, Jean. He might have killed us both."

"He's too big a coward to kill a more formidable foe than his own baby. But you were an idiot to meet him out here, Sally."

"He was with that freighters' outfit, but on horseback. He came to me a few minutes before camping-time, when I was walking for exercise. I did n't want a scene at camp, so I agreed to meet him out here alone, if he would keep out of sight."

"You're a bigger fool than Thompson's colt, and he swam the river to get a drink," said Jean. "But we must n't linger here. He may have a confederate."

"Not he, Jean. He's too suspicious to trust a confederate."

"Let's go back to camp, anyhow, Sally; mother will be missing us. But you need n't be afraid of Sam again. I've settled his hash," she said, as they hurried to the open. "Is n't it a terrible thing to be married?" she added, as soon as she could speak again.

"No, Jean. Marriage under right conditions is the world's greatest blessing. All enlightened men and women prefer to live in pairs, and make each other and their children as happy as possible. I admit that I made a big mistake when I married; but your mother did n't, because your father is one of God's noblemen. The fault is n't in marriage, but in the couple, one or both of whom make the trouble, when there is trouble. But the conditions between husbands and wives are not equal. Law and usage make the husband and wife one, and the husband that one. Where both the parties to the compact are better than the law, it does n't pinch either one; but when a woman finds herself chained for life to a sordid, disagreeable, stingy, domineering man, the advantages of law and custom are all on his side. It is no wonder that trouble ensues in such cases."

"But, young as I am, I have seen wives that could discount almost any man for meanness," said Jean. "There are women, now and then, who take all the rights in the matrimonial category, and their husbands have n't any rights at all."

"Women sometimes inherit the strongest traits of their fathers; I admit that. And such women can outwit the very best husbands."

"I've read of a woman," said Jean, musingly, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton by name, who went before a legislative assembly in New York a few years ago, and secured the passage of a law enabling a married woman of that State to hold, in her own right, the property bequeathed to her by her father. And then,

as if to prove that women are idiots, there were women in Albany who refused to associate with their financial savior any more. They said she had left her sphere. But never mind. The world is moving, and women are moving with it."

The camp-fires had died to heaps of embers, the lights were out in the tents and wagons, and all except themselves were settled for the night.

"Don't say anything to anybody about my meeting with Sam, will you, Jean?"

"Not unless he annoys you again. Then I'll be ready to meet him with facts."

"He might put your life in jeopardy, my dear."

"Jeopardy nothin'!" cried Jean, adopting the slang of the road. "He's too big a coward to put his neck in danger. But just you wait! I'll live to see an end to one-sided laws and a one-sexed government. See if I don't! And the men will fight our battle for us, too, as soon as they are wise enough."

"If you don't come across a matrimonial fate that'll change your tune, my name is n't Sally O'Dowd," exclaimed her companion, as they drew near the camp.

"Your name is n't O'Dowd, but Danover," cried Jean. "You're safe in making such a prophecy on such a basis."

XIII

AN APPROACHING STORM

"WE came eighteen miles to-day," wrote Jean, under date of May 28, "and halted for the night opposite Grand Island, in the Platte River, where we find both wood and pasture. All day we floundered through the muddy roads, occasionally getting almost swamped in heavy and treacherous bogs,

with 'water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink.' I'm too tired to write, and too sleepy to think."

On the evening of May 29 she added: "We started early, and reached Fort Kearney after eight miles of heavy wheeling, where we halted to write letters for the folks at home, and examine many things quaint and crude and curious. The old fort is weather-worn, and a general air of dilapidation pervades its very atmosphere. There are two substantial dwellings for the officers, though; and they (I mean the officers) keep up a show of military pomp, very amusing to us, but quite necessary to maintain in an Indian country, to hold the savage instinct in check. The officers were very gracious to daddie, and very kind and condescending to the rest of us. They made us a present of some mounted buffalo-horns, some elks' antlers, and the stuffed head of a mountain sheep, all of which, mother says, we'll be glad to leave at the roadside before the weary oxen haul them very far.

"A week ago a party passed us, going westward with a four-wheeled wagon, two yokes of discouraged oxen, two anxious-looking men, two dispirited women, and about fourteen snub-nosed, shaggy-headed children. On their wagon-cover was a sign, done in yellow ochre, which read: 'Oregon or bust!' To-day we met the same outfit coming back, and no description from my unpractised pen can do it justice. The party, doubtless from overcrowding, had quarrelled; and the two families had settled their dispute by dividing the wagon into two parts of two wheels each. On the divided and dilapidated cover of each cart were smeared in yellow ochre the words, 'Busted, by thunder!'

"May 30. We forded the Platte to-day. It is a broad, lazy, milky sheet of silt-thickened water, with a quicksand bottom. It is about two miles wide at this season of the year at the ford, and is three feet deep.

"The day was as hot as a furnace, and the sunshine

burned us like blisters of Spanish flies. Our wagon-beds were hoisted to the tops of their standards to keep them from taking water, and at a given signal from daddie, they were all plunged pell-mell into the quicksand, over which teams, drivers, wagons, and all were compelled to move quickly to avoid catastrophe.

"Poor dear mother suffered from constant nervous fear because of the quicksand and the danger that some of the children might be drowned. It took us two and a half hours to ford the stream; but we reached the opposite bank without accident, and camped near an old buffalo wallow, where we get clearer water than that of the Platte, but we are not allowed to drink it till it has been boiled. Cholera has broken out in the trains both before and behind us; and daddie lays our escape from attack thus far to drinking boiled water. We have no fuel but buffalo chips, and almost no grass for the poor stock. The game has disappeared altogether, and the fishes in the Platte don't bite. But we have plenty of beans and bacon, coffee, flour, and dried apples; so we shall not starve.

"June 1. The day has been intensely hot. The stifling air shimmers, and the parched earth glitters as it bakes in the sun. The mud has changed to a fine, impalpable dust, and the loaded air is too oppressive to breathe, if it could be avoided. We passed a number of newly made graves during the day. We meet returning teams every day that have given up the journey as a bad job. Daddie often says he'd die before he'd retrace his tracks, and then he would n't do it! We found at sundown, just as we were losing hope, a bountiful spring of clear, cold water, beside which we have halted for the night.

"June 3. Another insufferably hot day. But we encountered at nightfall a stiff west wind, which soon arose to a gale, in the teeth of which we with difficulty made camp and cooked our food. Heavy clouds blacken the sky as I write, and vivid flashes of sheet lightning, which

blind us for a moment, are followed by thunder that startles and stuns.

"June 4. The storm passed to the south of us, on the other side of the Platte. But daddie has ordered the tents and wagons staked to the ground hereafter every night, as long as we are travelling in these treeless, unsheltered bottom-lands, as he says we would have been swept away *en masse* into the river if last night's storm had squarely struck our camp."

The hoods of the wagons, so white and clean at the outset, were now of an ashen hue, disfigured by spots of grease, and askew in many places from damage to their supporting arches of hickory bows. Heavy log-chains, for use in possible emergencies, dangled between axles, and the inevitable tar-bucket rode adjacent on a creaking hook, from which it hung suspended by a complaining iron bail.

"The incessant heat by day, followed by the chilly air of night, is perilous to health, John," said Mrs. Ranger, one evening, as she lay wrapped in blankets in the big family wagon, watching the usual preparations for the evening meal.

He gazed into her pinched, white face with sudden apprehension.

"Don't be afraid of the cholera, dear," he said tenderly. "I understand the nature of the epidemic, and I don't fear it at all. Cholera is a filth disease, and we are guarding against it at every point. Your blood is pure, darling. There's nothing the matter with you but a little debility, the result of past years of overwork. Time and rest and change of climate will cure all that. No uncooked food or unboiled water is used by any of us, and no cold victuals are allowed to be eaten after long exposure to this pernicious, cholera-laden air. You can't get the germs of cholera unless you eat or drink them."

That Captain Ranger should have thus imbibed the germ theory of cholera long in advance of its discovery by medical schools, is only another proof that there is nothing new under the sun. A newer system of medical treatment than that of the Allopathic School, styled the Eclectic by its founders, had come into vogue before his departure from the States.

Many different decoctions of fiery liquid, of which capsicum was supposed to be the base, — conspicuous among them a compound called "Number Six," — proved efficacious in effecting many cures in the early stages of cholera; and the contents of Captain Ranger's medicine chest were in steady demand long after his supplies for general distribution had been exhausted.

"Can you imagine what this wild-goose chase of ours is for?" asked Mrs. Benson.

"I undertook it to gratify my good husband," was Mrs. Ranger's prompt reply.

"And I to gratify my daughter."

"Excuse me, ladies; but I came along to please myself," interposed Mrs. O'Dowd.

"I, too, came to please myself," cried Jean; "that is, I made a virtue of necessity, and compelled myself to be pleased. There are two things that mother says we must never fret about: one is what we can, and the other what we cannot, help. Every human being belongs primarily to himself or herself, and to satisfy one's self is sure to please somebody."

"But a married couple belong, secondarily, at least, to each other," said Mrs. Ranger. "No couple can pull in double and single harness at the same time."

"Some day," said Mrs. Benson, "it will become the fashion to read your journal, Jean; and then the dear public will both praise and pity our unsophisticated Captain, who led these hapless emigrants out on these plains to die."

"That's so, Mrs. Benson," exclaimed Jean; "and they won't see that it's all a part of the eternal programme. Evolution is the order of nature, and one generation of human beings is a very small fraction of the race at large."

"Have n't you gossiped long enough, mamma?" asked Mrs. McAlpin, petulantly. "Your supper is ready and waiting. What has detained you so long?"

"I was listening to the chat of the Ranger family. They are an uncommon lot; very clever and original."

"Yes, mamma; they talk like oracles. A little brusque and unpolished, but that will be outgrown in time. You're looking splendid, mamma! The society of your neighbors is a tonic. You must take it often."

"I wish we might all stop here, Daphne."

"We've no more right to these lands of the Indians than we have to —"

"Oregon," interrupted her mother. "Oregon was Indian territory originally."

Jean approached with a plate of hot cakes, saying: "I fell to thinking so deeply over the problems we had been talking about that I forgot what I was doing, and baked too many cakes. They're sweet and light, and we hope you'll like them."

"Thank you ever so much, Miss Jean!" said Mrs. McAlpin. "I congratulate you with all my heart upon the way you cheer your mother, my dear. You are a jewel of the first water!"

"We all try to keep mother in good spirits," replied Jean. "Dear soul! she's weak and nervous; and what seem trifles to us often appear like mountains to her. Never can I forget, to my dying day, the look of terror that came into her gentle eyes when we were crossing the Platte that day in the quicksands. The raised wagon-bed had tilted, for some cause. I suppose the weight of so many of us was not evenly distributed; and we should all have been pitched into the water if it had not been that

dear mother hustled us to the other side. She forgot her own danger in her effort to save the children, giving her orders like a sea captain in a storm. Each of us grabbed a baby, — Susannah's coon fell to my lot, — and we clung like death to the upper edge of the wagon-bed till the danger was over, and the great lopsided thing settled back to its place.

"But I must go now. Daddie's calling me to write up that pestilent old journal!"

On the evening of the 4th of June, the train had its first encounter with a blizzard.

Captain Ranger, seeing the approach of the storm, as did the cattle and horses, ordered a sudden halt a little way from the banks of the Platte. The day, like a number of its predecessors, had been oppressively hot; but about five o'clock a sudden squall came up, though not without premonitory warning in the way of a calm so dead that not a blade of grass was quivering. The wagon-hoods flapped idly, like sails becalmed in the tropics. Suddenly the air grew icy cold, bringing at first a moment of relief to suffocating man and beast.

"Gather your buffalo chips in a hurry," exclaimed the Captain, addressing the girls. "Get 'em under cover in the tents, under the wagon-beds; anywhere so they'll keep dry. Turn out the stock in a jiffy, boys. Head 'em away from the river. Drive 'em up yonder gulch. Be on the alert, everybody!"

XIV

A CAMP IN CONSTERNATION

“**S**TAKE down the wagons,” was the next order. “Don’t stop to pitch any more tents. Don’t try to kindle any fires.”

Scarcely had the orders been obeyed before a darkness as black as Erebus had settled upon the camp like a gigantic pall. It was a peculiar darkness, permeated by an ominous, silent, intangible, vibrating, appalling Something! A silence that could be felt was in the air. The oxen in the gulch bellowed in terror; the horses neighed. The stillness of the air was oppressive, portentous, awful. The women clasped the children in close embrace. The children clung to their protectors in silent terror. All hands save the teamsters, who were out with the stock at the mouth of the ravine, where they were stationed to guard the animals against stampede, crouched under the wagons in the Cimmerian blackness. Anon, a blinding flash of sheet lightning, followed by others and yet others in bewildering succession, awoke a rolling, roaring, reverberating cannonade of thunder. Guided by the flashes of lightning, the frightened men left the cattle to their fate and, returning to the camp, took refuge under the wagons. Hailstones as big as hens’ eggs fell by hundreds of tons, displacing the awful silence with a cannonade like unto the heaviest artillery of a great army in battle.

The wind blew a terrific gale. The chained wagons rocked like cradles. Several heavy vehicles in a neighboring train, not being chained to the ground, as the Ranger wagons had been, were upset and their contents ruined by the hail and rain. Others were blown bodily into the river. Luckily no lives were lost. The cattle and

horses, pelted by the hail till their bodies were bruised and bleeding, huddled together at the head of the gulch for mutual protection.

The storm lasted less than twenty minutes, and ceased as suddenly as it began. The black clouds soared away to the northward, leaving a blue starlit sky overhead, and underfoot a mass of hail and mud. The Platte, having caught the full fury of a cloud-burst a few miles above the camp, rose rapidly, threatening the frightened refugees in the wagons with a new danger. But the shallow banks were high enough to confine the mad rush of muddy water within an inch or two of the top, thus averting the horror of a flood which, had it come, would have completed the havoc of the storm.

The lightning, as though weary of its display of power, retreated to the distant hills, and played at hide-and-seek on the horizon's edge, while Heaven's Gatling guns answered each pyrotechnic display with a distant, growling, intermittent roar.

Mrs. McAlpin's carriage was a total wreck; but her wagons remained intact, and she and her mother escaped to them in safety.

The morning revealed a scene of desolation. The earth in all directions as far as the eye could see had been torn into gulleys by the mad rush of falling hail and rain, each seeking its level in frantic haste. Hailstones lay in heaps, some soiled by contact with the liquid mud, some as clean and white as freshly fallen snow.

The contents of Mrs. McAlpin's carriage were entirely gone. Nothing remained of the vehicle but one of its wheels and some shreds of its cover, which were found half buried in the mud. Of the harness, nothing was left but a bridle bit, in which was lodged a woman's glove, and near it the remains of a palm-leaf fan.

"We should all be thankful that no lives were lost," said Mrs. Ranger, who was looking on while Sally

O'Dowd and Susannah assisted her daughters, who, with Mrs. Benson and Mrs. McAlpin, were exposing the wet and dilapidated paraphernalia of the camp to the hot rays of the morning sun.

"But we'd have a heap mo' to thank Gahd fo', missus, if He'd hel' off dat stawm," exclaimed Susannah, with a characteristic "yah! yah! yah!"

At eleven o'clock the order was given to bring in the stock, and prepare to move on, when it was discovered that Scotty was missing.

"We s'posed he was helpin' Mrs. McAlpin's men, as he generally does, to get her things to rights, so we did n't bother our heads about him," said Sawed-off, who was Scotty's partner of the whip and yoke. "I've been doing the most of his share of the work ever since we've been on the road."

Scotty was nowhere to be found. An organized search was begun at once, and all thought of moving on was abandoned till the Captain should learn his fate. The cattle and horses were turned out on the range for another badly needed half-holiday. Through all the remainder of the day the anxious quest continued. Mrs. McAlpin was as pale as death. Her sombre weeds, worn for no known reason, formed a fitting frame for her pinched and anxious face and bright, abundant hair. Her mother was visibly agitated. Mrs. Ranger lay on her feather bed all through the trying afternoon, her eyes closed and her lips moving as if in prayer.

"Night again, and no Scotty!" exclaimed Captain Ranger, his voice husky with feeling. As no trace of the man had been discovered, the organized search was called off.

"Scotty's death was one of the freaks of the flood," said Hal.

"None of you ever did Scotty justice," exclaimed Mary, as she descended upon the party with a heaped plate of their staple food.

"That's what," echoed Jean, as she brought on the beans and bacon.

"Scotty knew more in a minute than half of us can ever learn," cried Marjorie, with whom he was a favorite.

"Yes," said the Captain, dryly. "He's a genius, Scotty is! He'll turn up presently. Doubtless he's off somewhere studying a new stratum of storm-clouds. He has killed two of my leaders already by making them start the whole load while his mind was on the incomprehensible and unknowable in nature. But I'll wager he knows enough to look out for himself in a crisis."

"He was a whole mine of information about other things, if he did n't know much about driving oxen," sobbed Jean.

"He is n't dead!" exclaimed Mrs. McAlpin. "I mean to continue the search myself to-night."

"You'll get caught by a panther!" cried Bobbie. "I have n't seen 'em, but I know they're there!"

"Where, Bobbie?" asked Marjorie.

"Up in the gulch. I can see 'em with my eyes shut!" and the child, not understanding the laugh that followed at his expense, hastened to the wagon where his mother lay, to receive the consolation that never failed him.

"It won't be against the laws of God or man for me to love Rollin if he is dead," said Mrs. McAlpin to herself, as she crept shivering from her retreat in her wagon to the ground. Throwing a shawl over her head, she hastened out in the direction in which Scotty was hurrying when she had last seen him. The cattle, quite satisfied from the unusual effects of a day's rest and a full meal, chewed their cuds quietly, or lay asleep in the best sheltered spots they could command, breathing heavily. She wandered fearlessly among them, calling frequently for the lost man, but received no response save an occasional "moo" from an awakened cow, or a friendly neigh from Sukie, who was tethered near.

The morning star rose in the clear blue of the bending sky as her search went on, and she knew that the long June day was breaking. Flowers of every hue, newly born from the convulsions of the recent storm, smiled at her in their dewy fragrance; and in the branches of a crippled cottonwood a robin began his matin song. A meadow lark, disturbed in its languorous wooing by the lone watcher's footsteps, soared upward in the crystal ether, sending back, when out of her sight, a swelling note of triumph, prolonged, triumphant, sweet.

"Rollin! Rollin Burns!" she called, repeating the name in every note of the scale.

At length a long, low moan startled her. She listened eagerly for a moment, and repeated her call. Whence had come that moan? There was no repetition of the sound. She spoke again, calling the name in a higher key.

Another moan — it might have been an echo from the canyon's walls — came, more distinct than the first, but the echoing gulch gave no indication of its location.

"Call again, Rollin! It is I, — your own Daphne!"
 "Is it indeed you, Daphne?"

She pinched herself to see if she was really awake. She had never heard her Christian name spoken by Burns before. The name sounded strangely sweet in the breaking twilight, and in spite of her apprehension and uncertainty her soul was glad.

"Call again, Rollin! Help is near."

"Come this way, Daphne! I am in a cave, almost under your feet. A boulder that I stepped upon rolled over, loosened by the storm, and let me through into the bowels of the earth. My leg is broken. I must have been unconscious. I have swooned or slept, or both. Be careful how you tread. There are badgers in this hole, and I have heard rattlesnakes."

"Which way, Rollin? Where are you?"

The sound of his voice seemed to come from beneath her feet.

"Is the storm over?"

"Yes, long ago. It's been over for thirty-six hours. But I can't locate you."

"Here, I tell you! Under this rock. If it had fallen directly on me, I should have been a goner. For God's sake, be careful, or you'll break your own dear neck! Don't get excited. Run for help, and don't stir up the rattlesnakes."

The injured man had fallen at first by the turning of the rock, as he had stated, giving his leg a twist that broke it, and, by the turning of his body in falling farther, had overturned the boulder again, and thus was held a prisoner.

Mrs. McAlpin peered into a narrow aperture through which the coming daylight had entered. Their eyes met.

"Daphne!"

"Rollin!"

"So near and yet so far!" cried the prisoner, as he struggled to free himself. A spasm of pain overspread his face, and a dew, like the death damp, settled on his hair and forehead.

"O God! he has fainted again!" she cried, running with all her might and screaming for help.

"What in thunder is the matter now?" exclaimed Captain Ranger, as he emerged, half dressed, from his tent.

"I've found Rollin! He's imprisoned in a cave, with a broken leg! Fetch spades and a mattock to dig away the dirt from the rock! Be quick!" cried Mrs. McAlpin, leading the way.

Nobody heard the robins sing, or paused to enjoy the triumphant melody of the lark.

Scotty was still in a merciful swoon. Very carefully the men loosened the rock from its hold on his legs, and with their united strength rolled it away from the mouth of the cave.

"It's damned lucky you are, old boy!" cried Yank, as the crippled man regained consciousness. "That rock

would have crushed you to pulp if the walls of the cave had n't saved you."

"A miss would have been as good as a mile!" replied Scotty, as he fainted again.

"Who's going to set these bones?" asked Sawed-off. "It's a bad fracture, compound and nasty. There's no severed artery, though, which is lucky, or he'd 'a' bled to death. Captain Ranger, did you ever set a broken bone?"

"Never."

"I'll do it," exclaimed Mrs. McAlpin. "Cut away his boot. Bring a cot from the camp. Bring some adhesive plaster. Captain, can you make some splints? Stay! I'll cut away the boot. There! Steady! Slow! If we can set the bones before he recovers consciousness, so much the better."

The cot with its unconscious burden was carried to the side of the widow's wagon.

"Bring water and more bandages, girls."

"Where did you get your skill?" asked the Captain, as Mrs. McAlpin felt cautiously for the broken bones and deftly snapped them into place.

"It is n't a very bad fracture," she said, unheeding the question, as she held the bones together while the orders for splints and bandages were being obeyed.

"Some water, quick, and some brandy!" she said in a firm voice, though her cheeks were blanching. She held stoutly to her work till the limb was securely encased in the proper supports. But when her patient recovered consciousness and looked inquiringly into her eyes, she fell, fainting, into the Captain's arms, and was carried to his family wagon, her eyelids twitching and her muscles limp. When she recovered, she found herself reclining in the wagon beside Mrs. Ranger, who was gently chafing her face and hands.

"All this has been too much for you, dearie," said the good woman.

"Where's Rollin?"

"In your mother's wagon. We have rigged him up a swinging bed, and Mrs. Benson will see that he wants for nothing. You are to ride here, in the big wagon, with me."

"You have no room for me in here. You and I, and Mary and Jean, and Marjorie and Bobbie, and Sadie and the baby and Sally, and the three little O'Dowds, and Susannah and George Washington can't all ride and sleep in this narrow space. We'd offend the open-air ordinances of heaven."

"It is all arranged, my dear; don't worry. Our overflow has gone to another wagon. We'll have plenty of room."

"But Mr. Burns?"

"Your good mother has taken entire charge of him. She is behaving as beautifully in this crisis as you are, my dear."

XV

CHOLERA RAGES

"CHOLERA is epidemic everywhere along the road," wrote Jean in her diary on the 8th of June. "Our company is not yet attacked, but our dear mother is seriously alarmed. She counts all the graves we pass during the day, and sums them up at night for us to think about. Some days there is a formidable aggregate."

The fame of Mrs. McAlpin's skill as a physician and surgeon, and of Captain Ranger's marvellous medicine-chest, grew rapidly in the front and rear of the Ranger train as the epidemic spread.

"It is lamentable to note the lack of forethought in many people," Captain Ranger would say, as he dealt out

his supplies of "Number Six," podophyllin and capsicum, which grew alarmingly scant as the demand increased, and his patience was sorely tried. But he never refused aid to any who applied for it; and the "woman doctor," who because of her proficiency was considered little else than a witch, was scarcely given time to eat or sleep.

"How do you keep your company from catching the cholera?" asked the anxious father of a numerous family, most of whom had fallen victims to the scourge.

"Common-sense should teach us to allow no uncooked or stale food to be eaten, and no surface or unboiled water to be drunk. Let all companies be broken into small trains, and keep as far apart from each other as possible. Rest a while in the heat of every noonday. Don't be afraid of the Indians, or of anything or anybody else. The greatest enemy of mankind is fear."

But in spite of both his precept and his example, the cholera continued its ravages; and Captain Ranger, to avoid contact with the epidemic, and, if possible, relieve Mrs. Ranger's mind of apprehension, changed his course from the main travelled road, and turned off to the north by west, leaving the multitude to their fate.

"The other trains can follow if they choose, and we can't help it," he said to his wife; "but I must get my family away from the crowd, as the best way to save us all from the nasty epidemic."

"Is n't there danger of getting lost, John, or of getting captured by the Indians?" asked Mrs. Ranger, as the teams were headed for the Black Hills, — a long, undulating line, which looked in the shimmering distance like low banks of dense fog.

"My compass will point the way, Annie. The Indians will give us no trouble if we treat them kindly. They're a plaguy sight more afraid of us than we have any reason to be of them."

Mrs. Ranger, blessed with full confidence in her hus-

band's ability to accomplish whatsoever he undertook, leaned back on her pillows and guarded the children from danger, as was her wont.

On June 15, Jean made another entry in her much-neglected journal, as follows:—

“We have travelled all day between and over and around, and then back again, among low ranges of the Black Hills. The scenery is grand beyond description, and the road we are making as we go along, for others to follow if they are wise, is good. Lilliputian forests of prickly pears spread in all directions, and are very troublesome. Their thorns, barbed, and sharp as needle-points, are in a degree poisonous. We laugh together over our frequent encounters with the little pests, though our poor wounded feet refuse to be comforted. But we are missing the long lines of moving wagons, before and behind us, swaying and jolting over the dusty roads we've left to the southward, and we are glad to be alone, or as nearly so as our big company will permit. The streams we cross at intervals are clear, and the water is sweet and cold.

“Mother seems in better health and spirits since we have removed her from the constant sight of so much suffering and death.

“Dear, patient, faithful, loving mother! Will her true history, and that of the thousands like her, who are heroically enduring the dangers and hardships of this long, long journey, be ever given to the world, I wonder?”

Near nightfall, on their second day's journey away from the main thoroughfare, they encountered a long freight-train, in charge of fur-traders, the second thus met since their travels began. Every wagon was heavily loaded with buffalo robes which had been prepared for market by the tedious, patient labor of Indian women. As the wives and slaves of English, French, Spanish, and Canadian hunters and traders, these women followed the

fates of their grumbling and often cruel lords and masters through the vicissitudes of a precarious existence, with which nevertheless they seemed strangely content.

The leader or captain of the freighters' outfit was a tall, bronzed, and handsome Scotchman, whose nationality was betrayed at a glance. Captain Ranger bargained with him for a big, handsomely dressed buffalo robe, paying therefor in dried apples and potatoes.

"Our men are getting scurvy from the lack of fruit and vegetables," the leader said, as the exchange was concluded. "When they are in camp the squaws keep them supplied with berries, camas, and wapatoes. But they can't bring the women out on a trip like this, away from the scenes of their labors."

"Here's a present for you, Annie," said Captain Ranger, bringing a soft, heavy, furry robe to his wife, and spreading it over her much-prized feather bed. "It will help you to bear the rough jolting over the rocky roads."

"Thanks, darling. You are very kind and thoughtful, but I shall not need it long."

"Oh, yes, you will, Annie! We've passed the cholera belt. The sun rides higher every day; and I'm sure you'll soon be all right."

"Did you notice that big handsome Scotchman who seemed to be the boss of that freighters' outfit?" asked Mrs. McAlpin, addressing Jean, and emerging from her hiding-place in one of the wagons after the outfit had passed out of sight and hearing and the Ranger company had encamped.

"Yes, Mrs. McAlpin. He seemed master of the situation."

"Do you think he discovered me or mamma?"

"I did n't think to notice whether he saw either of you or not."

"I kept out of his sight, and made mamma do likewise."

"Did you know him?"

"May I trust you, Jean?"

"Why, certainly! What's up?"

"I need you, Jeanie; I need a friend with a level head."

Mrs. McAlpin's face was gray, like ashes, and her aspect of fear was startling.

"What under heaven is the matter?" asked Jean.

"That man is my husband!"

"Then I congratulate you. Daddie was much pleased with him. But I thought your husband was a man of leisure, travelling in Europe, or Asia, or among the ruins of Central America. You told me he was an archæologist. Did you expect to find him here on these plains?"

"No, Jean, or I should not have been here myself. Only think of it! I started on this journey on purpose to hide myself away from him for good and all. He had gone to England a year ago to claim a vast estate, and I planned to leave Chicago for this wild-goose chase on purpose to avoid him. I had no idea he'd ever think of taking up a business like freighting in a fur company. But there is no way to foresee the acts of a man who has more money than he knows what to do with. I suppose he grew weary of the Old World." Mrs. McAlpin sighed.

"Are you quite sure it was he?"

"It could not have been anybody else. I'd know that voice if I heard it in Kamchatka. And I saw him, too. I cannot be mistaken."

"And you are determined not to live as his wife any more?"

"I simply cannot, will not, live a lie any longer."

"Why do you tell me about this, Mrs. McAlpin? I'm nothing but an inexperienced girl."

"But you have more discretion than most grown-up people."

"That's 'cause I've never been in love, I guess. They say that all people when in love are fools."

"I want you to go with me to meet that man to-night, Jean."

"I? What for?"

"I'm going to talk it out; and I'll need a witness."

"Absurd! You remind me of a moth around a candle. Does your mother know about this?"

"No. I let her think an Indian was wanting me for a wife, and she remained hidden till the freighters had gone. The rest was easy. She is mortally afraid of Indians."

"I can't imagine why you desire an interview with a man you are trying to avoid. How did you arrange a meeting?"

"I sent him a note by Hal, who thinks I want to buy a buffalo robe like your mother's."

"To be plain with you, Mrs. McAlpin, you're a fool."

"I know it. But I confess to you that I want to see him so I can defy him."

"If you want sensible advice, go to daddie."

"I don't want anybody's advice. I just want you to accompany me, and keep hidden so as to be close at hand during the interview. He has no idea that he is going to meet Daphne Benson."

As Jean had been forbidden by her father to continue her rides in Mrs. McAlpin's company, she did not feel satisfied with herself during this stolen interview.

"Then you did n't let your husband know it was you who wanted to see him?"

"Of course not. What do you take me for?"

"I'll certainly take you for one of the silliest women on earth if you don't give up this interview."

"I believe, after all, that you're right, Jeanie. But I thought, if I met him unexpectedly out here in these wilds and put him upon his honor, he would never try

to trouble me again. I have something very important to say to him."

"Then wait till we get to Oregon. We must go back to camp at once. It is time all honest folks were at home in bed."

They found Mrs. Ranger sitting alone on a wagon-tongue, shivering in the sharp night air.

"I'm very ill, my daughter," she said; "dangerously so. I've been watching and waiting for you the past half-hour. Where have you been?"

"She's been pommelling a little common-sense into my addled noddle," said Mrs. McAlpin.

"I've been taking a little walk with Mrs. McAlpin, mother dear, that's all. But what's the matter, mother? Where's daddie?"

"Asleep, poor man. I don't want him disturbed. Get me the bottle of 'Number Six.' There!" taking a draught of the fiery liquid. "I'll soon be better. Go to bed."

Jean never could forgive herself for not sounding an alarm. During the remainder of the short summer night Mrs. Ranger wrestled with her fate, suffering and unattended. The heavy breathing of the weary oxen as they slept, or the low chewing of their cuds in the silence, the occasional hoot of an owl, or the sharp scream of a belated eagle, the sighing of the wind in the juniper-trees, and the acute pangs of her suffering body occupied her half-conscious thoughts as she patiently awaited the dawn, which broke at last, spreading over earth and sky the radiance of approaching sunrise.

"John dear, come quickly; I'm very sick, and I believe I'm dying!" cried the lone sufferer at last.

Her husband was instantly aroused.

"Why didn't you call me long ago, darling?" he asked, crawling from beneath a tent and rubbing his eyes to accustom them to the light. A deadly fear blanched his cheeks as his wife fell back in convulsions in his arms.

She opened her eyes after a prolonged spasm of pain and gave him a look of melting tenderness.

"Make the biggest tent ready, boys!" he called, holding her close. "Fetch the feather bed and the buffalo robe. Get hot water, Sally. Get everything, everybody," he exclaimed, carrying her in his arms and pacing excitedly to and fro.

"Oh, why did I bring you out here into this wilderness?" he sobbed, as he laid her on the bed and chafed her stiffening fingers. "Only live, and the remainder of your days shall be as free from care as a bird's!"

"But I shall not live, John," she whispered during a brief lucid interval, her eyes beaming with love and devotion. "Or, rather, I shall not die, but awake into newness of life. This body is worn out, but that is all. The life that animates it will never die, though I am going away."

No effort that circumstances permitted was spared to retain the vital spark. Not a man, woman, or child in the company would have hesitated at any possible sacrifice to keep her spirit within the body, or to give her ease and comfort in passing to the land of souls.

The afternoon was wellnigh spent when she grew easier. A prolonged interval of consciousness followed.

"Where's Bobbie?" she asked in a whisper.

"Here, mother!" cried the child, who had been a dazed and silent watcher all the day.

"Bless his little life!" she whispered with a look of unutterable love.

"Come, Bobbie dear," said Jean, "let's go out and see if we can't find heaven, where God is. Mother is going there to live with the angels. Let's see if there'll be any room for us."

"There'll be room for me, Jeanie; there'll have to be, for I'm going to die before long."

"Why do you think so, Bobbie?"

"Cos I just am. I dreamed I went to heaven. It was a tight house, too, like Oregon, or Texas."

"You must n't think you're going to die, Bobbie."

"There is n't any surely death," said the child. "It is just going to heaven."

XVI

JEAN'S VISIT BEYOND THE VEIL

TO the surprise of her sorrowing loved ones, Mrs. Ranger rallied before sundown, after a stupor of several hours, her eyes bright and her faculties wonderfully clear.

"It seems hard to leave you alone in this wilderness, John," she said in a low whisper, while feebly clasping her husband's hand.

The sun's expiring rays fell upon the open tent, illuminating her angelic face, settling like an aureole upon her bright brown hair, and causing her eyes to glow like stars. "I'm not afraid of death, dear. I am not even afraid to leave you alone with the children in the wilderness, for I know you'll do your duty. But I am sorry to leave all the burden for you to carry alone. There is One who heareth even the young ravens when they cry. Trust in Him, dearest. He doeth all things well."

"How can I give you up?" cried the distracted husband, stroking her pale cheeks and forehead tenderly.

"You won't be giving me up, John. God will let me come to you sometimes to bless and comfort you. I know He will; for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever. I could n't leave you to go far away if I tried, dear, and I'll never try. Do try to be a Christian, John."

"I've always been a Christian, according to my lights, my darling; and God Himself can't keep me away from

you in heaven, — if there is a God and a heaven," he added under his breath, unable, even in that trying hour, to lay aside his doubts.

"God is just, and He will give you the benefit of every honest doubt, John."

"But He ought to let me keep you, darling; I need you, oh, I need you!"

"All is well, my husband. I am safe, and so are you, in the Everlasting Arms. Call the children; I must be going. Don't you hear the angels sing?"

The children were aroused, but she had relapsed into unconsciousness, and it was fully an hour before her reason again returned.

"Mother," she said once, while her mind was wandering, "did you get my deed? Are you snugly settled in the little house? I tried very hard to provide for your and father's welfare in your last days, and —" Her concluding words were inaudible.

"Yes, darling, your parents are provided for; there is no doubt about it," cried her husband, as she awoke again to semi-consciousness. And if ever a man experienced a thrill of supreme satisfaction in the midst of a grave sorrow, that man was Captain John Ranger, of the overland wagon train.

"Mary!"

It was her next word of consciousness.

"Come close, dear; and Jean, and Marjorie, and Harry. The light has faded, and I cannot see you, darlings. But be good. Obey your father. Take good care of Bobbie, Sadie, and Baby Annie. God bless —" The sentence was not finished.

There was another prolonged convulsion. Her husband released her hand and closed her eyes, believing all was over. But while they all waited, silent and awe-stricken, as if expecting a resolute move from some one, she opened her eyes again and whispered, "John!"

"Yes, Annie. John is here."

For an instant she beamed upon him with a look of unutterable love. Then, as if attracted by a familiar voice, she turned her gaze toward the only space in the tent where no one was standing.

"Yes," she cried in clear, ringing tones; and her brightening eyes grew strangely full of eager expectation. "I'm coming! Tell grannie I'll be ready for her when she comes to heaven!"

"Leave me alone with my dead!" said the bereaved husband, as he cleared the tent of other occupants and threw himself upon the ground beside the still and cold and irresponsive body. No longer animated by the invisible power that for forty years had thrilled it with the mystery of being, it lay with closed eyes and folded hands beneath its drapings of white, upon the heavy, furry buffalo robe, placed beneath the inanimate form by the husband's loving hands.

Through all the years of John Ranger's sturdy manhood, that self-denying life had been his, devoted with all its tenderness to his interests and those of the sweet pledges of their love, for whose sake he must now live on, alone.

Months after, when the remnant of the Ranger family had reached the land "where rolls the Oregon," a letter came to the bereaved husband and father, by way of the Isthmus of Panama, bringing tidings of the dear great-grandmother's transition; and John Ranger, still an agnostic, awaiting the proofs of immortality that had never come to his physical senses in such a manner as to be recognized, wandered out alone among the whispering firs, and cried in bitterness of spirit: "Man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?"

"I ought to have known better than to bring you out here to die in the wilderness, Annie darling!" cried the grief-stricken husband, caressing the attenuated fingers

that lay stiff and cold upon the pulseless breast. "You would never have undertaken the journey but to gratify me; and the end is here! If you had positively refused to come, that might have settled it. But I knew your wishes, and disregarded them; so all the blame is mine. If I had always taken counsel of you, my better self, as I ought to have done, I should not now have been left with our precious little ones in these wild fastnesses, in danger of I know not what."

"Daddie!" cried an anxious voice, "may I come in?"

He heard, but did not answer. Jean opened the door of the tent, and knelt beside the still, white form of her mother.

"Could n't you sleep, my daughter?" asked her father, reaching across the shrouded figure of his dead and tenderly caressing her tear-wet face.

"No, daddie; at least, not any more. I've had one short nap. When I woke and heard you moaning, I thought maybe you'd be glad to have me come in. I want to tell you my dream. May I, daddie dear, for mother's sake?"

"Yes, child."

"I dreamed that I was all alone in a great park. I have never seen anything half so beautiful when awake, so I can't tell you what it was like. But there were flowers and trees and fountains, and birds of paradise that sang heavenly songs. It seemed that I could understand the language of every bird and butterfly and tree and flower. The birds did not seem the least bit afraid of me; and the memory of their music is sweet in my ears now.

"I don't know how I got across, but before I had time to think about it, I found myself on the opposite side of a broad and shining river, as clear as crystal and as blue as the sky. On the water, which I could see through to a wonderful depth, were countless living things, reflecting all the colors of the rainbow, and many more, — all swim-

ming, as if without effort, among the rarest foliage and flowers. Everything seemed alive, — that is, sentient, if that's the proper word, — and acted as if it knew me, and was glad I had come.

"The park I had first entered was even prettier at a distance than it had been at closer range. The river-bank, which was covered with grass that looked like pea-green velvet spangled with diamonds, was furnished in spots with vine-embowered seats. To sit or step upon them did not crush the vines; and I noticed that after they had yielded to pressure, they would rebound at its removal, like a rubber ball, — only, unlike the rubber, they seemed to have a consciousness all their own. The bending green of the trees was like emeralds, and their leaves shone like satin. The hearts of the flowers glowed like balls of living fire; and when I plucked a spray, there was left no broken stem to show what I had done. I was too happy to think, and I closed my eyes in absolute peace.

"Suddenly a brilliant light permeated everything; the river looked like melted silver, and the park glowed so brightly that I tried to shield my eyes with my hand. But my hand was almost transparent, and I could see everything as well when my eyes were closed as open. As I sat, quietly inbreathing the wonderful beauty of it all, filled with a happiness that I cannot express in words, there came to me, not audibly, but yet as if spoken by somebody, the words of the last Sunday-school lesson I had learned in the little log schoolhouse in the Illinois woods: 'And there shall be no night there!'

"'Am I in heaven?' I tried to ask aloud; but my words gave forth no audible sound. And though I heard nothing in the way we hear sounds, a reply reached my senses instantly. I heard it through and through me, though not a word was spoken. Do you want to hear the rest of it, daddie dear?"

"Yes, child. Go on." His eager gaze betrayed his

soul-hunger. He buried his face in his hands. "I am listening, Jean."

"Then I will go on. In a little while I found myself floating, but I was n't the least bit afraid; I just trusted. Pretty soon I became conscious that somebody was guiding me along. I did not stir; I hardly breathed. I was too happy to move, lest I should break the spell and find that I was only dreaming.

"Suddenly I found myself seated in a wonderful chair. It was clear, like crystal, but white, like ivory. It was beautifully carved, and the figures seemed instinct with life. They yielded readily beneath my weight, — though I was not conscious of any weight, — and they always returned to their proper shape when relieved of pressure. The crystal river rippled at my feet. The beautiful park spread everywhere. A bird of paradise alighted on a bough over my head and shook its plumage in the air, exhaling a perfume that was like that of the tuberose.

"And now comes the part that you will most like to hear. As I sat, I heard, or rather felt, a sound, as of a gentle wind. A white arm, thinly covered with a filmy, lustrous lace, stole gently around my neck, and mother glided down beside me into the chair. Her eyes were as blue as the heavens and as bright as the morning star.

"I was n't the least bit surprised or startled. I did not care to speak, nor did I expect her to utter a word. I did not want the heavenly silence broken. I pressed her hand, which was as soft as down, and pink and white, like a sea-shell. She put her finger to her lips, as if in token of silence.

"Suddenly a light, different from any I had yet seen, surrounded us. We looked upward, and a form like unto the Son of Man stood before us. He was transparent, and as radiant as the sun. We lost ourselves in the light of His presence, as the stars lose themselves in the light of the sun. He did not speak an audible word; but as He outspread His hands above our heads, I turned to

gaze at mother, whose raiment was as sheer as the finest gauze. It was all edged with luminous lace; and the sheen on her hair was like spun gold, glistening in the sunshine."

"Did n't she say anything, Jean?"

This man, who had all his life refused to listen to any story which could not be verified by physical law, had lost himself in the strange recital. Jean looked as one transfigured. She resumed her story.

"Mother said: 'You must go back to your duties, Jean.' Her arms were about my neck, and her shining draperies floated around us like a mist with the sun shining on it. 'You have a long and weary road before you, Jean,' she said, speaking silently, but in words that could be felt. 'The experiences you will encounter will all be good for your development, my dear,' she added, still inaudibly. 'The time will come when you will realize, no matter what befalls you, that every lesson in life is necessary for your development. You are in the arms of the Infinite One, whose kingdom is within you, and who doeth all things well. Go back to your dear father, Jean. Tell him I am not dead. Tell Mary, Marjorie, Harry, and all the rest—' Just then I felt a sudden sensation, as of floating downward, toward the earth.

"A cow lowed as I stirred myself in the wagon, and I remembered that you had tied Flossie to a wheel to keep her from straying from camp. Bells tinkled on the hillsides, the wind whistled in the trees, and I sat up, wide awake. I heard you moaning, daddie, and my heart went out to you with a longing that I cannot describe. I could not rest till I had told you all. What do you suppose it means?"

"I can only say, like one of old, 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.' Leave me now, daughter. You are weary and must sleep."

XVII

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

JEAN passed out silently into the night, and pausing a moment, looked up to the silent stars, and whispered: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork."

How long she stood meditating she never realized. The tethered cow lowed again, — a plaintive, beseeching wail, that seemed almost human. She was mourning for her slain calf, poor thing, — a calf left by the roadside at its birth. It had been mercifully killed by Captain Ranger's order, that it might escape the hardships of a sure but lingering death in following its ill-fated mother.

The cow's udder was distended and feverish. Jean, as mindful of the practical affairs of life as of its mysteries, knelt upon the ground, and, with the skill of much practice in the art of milking, relieved the poor bereft mother of her pain.

"Poor Flossie!" she said, as the patient animal drew a sigh of relief. "Poor Flossie! It seemed cruel to deprive you of your baby. And they did it, too, before your very eyes! You must be thirsty, Flossie; you're so feverish," she said, as she brought the grateful animal a pail of clear, cold water.

Jean crept shivering into bed between her sleeping sisters, where she tried in vain to lie awake, to live over again the vivid experiences of her dream.

"Was it a dream?" she asked herself as she cuddled close among the blankets. "Who knows what dreams are, anyhow? And is there anybody on the earth who can understand, define, or fathom the mystery of sleep?" In a few minutes she was fast asleep, and when she awoke it was morning.

"There are, there must be, other senses finer and more acute than our five physical ones," she thought, as she crept from her bed, refreshed and wide awake.

The stars had paled, and the clear gray of the early dawn lit up the crests of the abounding hills.

The simple preparations for the funeral rites were made in silence. Men and women moved mechanically about the camp. The very cattle seemed to understand.

No casket was procurable, but every man in camp was ready to do all in his power to supply the need. Junipers of goodly size abounded in the neighboring woods. From two of these, felled for the purpose, thick puncheons were hewn to form a crude but stanch enclosure for the good woman's final home. A grave was made, with hard labor, in the abounding sandstone, and the women lined its vault and edges with flattened boughs of evergreen, thus making an ideal resting-place for the still, white form, as beautiful in death as it had been in youth.

There was no prayer or sermon. The simple rites were about to close when Mary whispered to her father: "I have heard mother say she wanted us all to sing when they should be laying her away." And the three eldest daughters of the peaceful dead and the storm-rent living sang with tremulous but not unmusical tones:—

"Oh, heaven is nearer than mortals think,
When they look with trembling dread
At the misty future that stretches on
From the silent home of the dead.

"'T is no lone isle in a boundless main;
No brilliant but distant shore,
Where the loving ones who are called away
Must go to return no more.

"No, heaven is near us; the mighty veil
Of mortality blinds the eye,
That we see not the glorious angel bands,
On the shores of eternity.

"I know, when the silver cord is loosed,
When the veil is rent away,
Not long and dark shall the passage be
To the realms of endless day."

John Ranger looked upward with bared brow and streaming eyes, and in his heart a flickering hope was born.

The Reverend Thomas Rogers, with all his fervent eloquence and well grounded belief in the very orthodox scheme of salvation which he had so constantly preached, had never shaken his doubts as did the plaintive promises of that simple, impressive hymn.

His devoted wife, strong in her faith in the efficacy of prayer, had long ceased to speak to him of her religious convictions, for which his ready logic and quaint ridicule suggested no answer. At such times, consoling herself with the command of her Master, she would enter into her closet, shut the door, and pray for him and their children in secret, with never a doubt that sometime, someway, her prayers would be answered openly. And who shall say that her faith was not at last rewarded, in a way she least expected, through that plaintive song, through which, being dead, she had yet spoken?

After the burial, the remainder of the day was spent in the silent performance of the many accumulated duties of the camp. There was no time for the luxury of grief. The women and girls washed, ironed, cooked, did the dishes, mended wearing apparel, sewed up rents in wagon-covers and tents, and gathered heaps of wild flowers, with which they adorned the fresh mound of earth that none of them expected ever to see again.

The men were not idle. A broken ox-yoke needed mending. Wagon-tires were reset. Such heavy articles as could be dispensed with were discarded.

Jamie's cradle, for which Mrs. Ranger had begged a

place in their effects, and her grandmother's spinning-wheel, which she had stored in one of the wagons, were among the articles ordered to be thrown away.

"Your mother will not miss them now," said Captain Ranger, huskily.

"It is a shame to disregard our dear mother's wishes, now that she cannot speak for herself," said Mary, in a whisper, aside to Jean.

"I know it; and I've already made a bargain with Mrs. McAlpin to store them in one of her wagons. Daddie will thank us for it sometime."

Sadly and silently the work went on; for the living had to be cared for, and nothing more could be done for the dead.

When evening came Jean sought her journal, climbed to the rim of the little natural amphitheatre overlooking the sparkling spring of icy water near her mother's last resting-place, and read in the last space she had left blank, in her father's bold chirography, some lines of a poem which he had quoted from memory:—

" 'T was midnight, and he sat alone,
The husband of the dead.
That day the dark dust had been thrown
Above her buried head.

" Her orphaned children round him slept,
But in their sleep would moan;
In bitterness of soul he wept.
He was alone — alone.

" The world is full of life and light,
But, ah, no light for me!
My little world, once warm and bright,
Is cheerless as the sea.

" Where is her sweet and kindly face?
Where is her cordial tone?
I gaze upon her resting-place
And feel that I'm alone.



"The lovely wife, maternal care,
 The self-denying zeal,
 The smile of hope that chased despair,
 And promised future weal ;

"The clean, bright hearth, nice table spread,
 The charm o'er all things thrown,
 The sweetness in whate'er she said, —
 All gone! I am alone.

"I slept last night, and then I dreamed ;
 Perchance her spirit woke ;
 A soft light o'er my pillow gleamed,
 A voice in music spoke :

" ' Forgotten, forgiven, all neglect,
 Thy love recalled, alone ;
 The babes I loved, O love, protect,
 I still am all thine own.' "

"Dear bereaved and sorrowing daddie!" sighed Jean, as she closed the book. "I cannot write a word to-night. Sacred to him and his be the page on which he has inscribed these echoes of his heart. But let nobody say, after this, that daddie has no sentiment in his make-up. The trouble is that he is too busy a man to give rein to his feelings, except under extraordinary pressure. I wish he had n't tried to throw away those heirlooms of mother's, though. The oxen would n't have felt the difference in the load. It was an act that he'll be ashamed of some day."

Weeks after, when the memory-hallowed relics came to light, Captain Ranger bowed his head upon his hands and gave way to such a convulsion of grief as had not shaken him, even at the time of her transition. Jean had good cause to recall the stanzas he had inscribed to her mother's memory in her battered journal, as she said to herself: "I knew all the time that daddie's heart was right. It is only necessary to touch it in the proper place to show that it is tender." Once more she closed the book without having written a word.

But we must not anticipate.

On the 22d of June another entry is recorded, — Jean's last memorandum of their journey in the Black Hills: "The prickly pears still give us much annoyance. The roads are heavy with sand, and the rocks over which our wagons must bump and bound are terribly rough and jagged.

"Across the Platte, and away to the southward many miles, though they seem much nearer, owing to the rarity of the air, are quaint and curious formations in the rocky cliffs, worn by the winds of ages into rude images of men and animals that stare at us with sunken eyes, their broken noses, grinning skulls, and disfigured bodies reminding us of unhappy phantoms risen from the under world.

"Sometimes the semblance of a great mosque or cathedral rears its domes and minarets in the clear blue of the heavens; and sometimes what seems a great embattled fortification is seen rising with realistic majesty from a vast sage plain that looks, with a little aid of the imagination, like the dried-up bed of a big moat. Of course, 't is distance lends enchantment to the view,' as no doubt the images we see so distinctly would resolve themselves into shapeless masses if we could see them at close range.

"The grass we so much need for the stock has again disappeared, and daddie says we shall return to-morrow to the main travelled road. Wild flowers are blooming in profusion all around our camp, smiling at us as if in mockery of the prevailing desolation. Wood is scarce again, and we find few buffalo chips.

"We seldom see any more deer or antelope, and the buffalo have all escaped to the distant hills; that is, all but the hapless multitudes that have been cruelly and needlessly slaughtered by the unthinking and greedy hunters of the plains.

"We passed half-a-dozen newly made graves again to-day, and it is evident that we are getting back into the dreaded cholera belt. The day has been extremely hot, but the evening is chilly and blustering. Daddie

says the most of the victims of the epidemic are women. I wonder if such sorrow as ours pervades every family into whose ranks the Silent Messenger comes unbidden and steals away its hope.

"The Indians seem to have all been scared away by the cholera. What must they think of us, who claim to be civilized and even enlightened, who have come to bring them our religion, and with it starvation, pestilence, and death?

"Our world is n't yet fit for the abode of anything but beasts of prey, of which poorly civilized man is chief. No wonder the Indians fear and hate us. We destroy their range, we scare away their game, we scatter disease and death among them; and as rapidly as possible we seize and possess their lands. 'No quarter for man or beast' should be written upon our foreheads in letters of fire. But maybe we are merely fulfilling our destiny. I cannot tell; it's all a mystery." She closed the book with a sigh.

XVIII

THE LITTLE DOCTOR

AFTER leaving the Black Hills and descending again into the valley of the Platte, the Ranger company found travelling still more difficult than before they had left the main travelled road. The cattle, from burning their hoofs in the alkali pools, through which they were often compelled to wade for hours at a stretch, became afflicted with a serious foot-ail.

"A more dangerous epidemic than the cholera menaces us now," said Mrs. McAlpin, as she watched the poor brutes limping along the road, many of them bellowing with pain and writhing under the cruel lashes of the

drivers' whips, as they hobbled wearily on toward the setting sun.

"Yes," replied Captain Ranger, as he blanched with apprehension. "Our very lives depend upon the cattle; we have no other means of getting out of the wilderness. We must do something heroic to heal their feet, or we'll all be left to die together."

Scotty, whose serious accident had been overshadowed by the death and burial of Mrs. Ranger, and who had grown weary of receiving only such attention as could be bestowed upon an invalid not considered dangerously afflicted, began to demand the careful nursing he at first pretended to disdain. The jolting of the wagon, in which he still lay upon a sort of swinging stretcher, though it alleviated the roughness of constant rebounds from the rocky roads, aggravated the inflammation of his wound; and the pain grew more intolerable as the bones began to knit. His ravings of discontent were often hard for Mrs. Benson to endure. But she adhered resolutely to her purpose as her daughter's chaperon to prevent too frequent visits between the twain, and often kept Mrs. McAlpin away from his side for many hours together.

"Scotty has managed somehow to disarrange his bandages, Little Doctor," said Captain Ranger; "and badly as our cattle need attention, you will be obliged to look after his case this evening. I know how punctilious your mother is over what she is pleased to call the proprieties, but you must attend the fellow professionally, whether she consents or not."

"I do not want any more disagreeable encounters with my mother, Captain."

"Damn it! I beg your pardon, ma'am! But I'm sure God swore in His wrath under less provocation, — if there is any truth in Holy Writ. These are no times for conventional hair-splittings. You are in duty bound to visit Scotty as his physician. I will accompany you if it will help you out."

"I shall be glad indeed of your company, Captain. But women are not supposed to be doctors. We've always been taught to look upon the profession as one beyond our comprehension."

"And indeed it is beyond your comprehension. Men do not comprehend it any more than you do. If they did, it would long ago have been developed into a science, instead of what it is,—empiricism. I'm afraid I'll swear again if I hear any more nonsense about the things women are not supposed to know because they are women."

"Are you ready to accompany me now, Captain?"

"I'll have to be. But our lunch is ready; and, by my beans and bacon, I must have something to eat first! There! I did n't mean to swear. It was a sort of slip of the tongue."

"I am free to admit that it is n't polite to swear, Captain. But you did n't take the name of God in vain; so you are forgiven. You will grant that swearing, even by beans and bacon, is a bad habit, though. Don't set a bad example before the children, to say nothing of the rest of us," she added, laughing.

They found the patient in a high fever.

"It is his impatience that does it," said Mrs. Benson.

"He fumes like a madman sometimes."

Mrs. McAlpin deftly unbound, dressed, and rebandaged the unfortunate limb.

"We're doing nicely," she said, when her work was finished. "You must n't fret yourself into a fever again. A sick man should be as serene as a May morning."

"How in the name o' Melchizedek and the Twelve Apostles is a man going to keep cool when the thermometer is raging in the nineties, and one's self-elected nurse is scolding like a sitting hen? If she'd ride in the other wagon and leave you to do the nursing, I'd stand a chance to recover."

"Mamma is getting on famously," laughed the Little

Doctor. "You are so amiable and sweet-tempered yourself that I can't see why she does n't fall down before your injured foot and worship you. I feel almost tempted to try it myself. You don't think she is enduring all this for fun, do you?"

"I suppose I have n't been acting the angel; but it was because I wanted the society of my doctor."

"You allude to Mrs. McAlpin, of course," said the Captain, smiling.

"Who else in thunder should I mean? There is but one woman doctor in the world, so far as I know. Did n't she find me in that infernal hole, wedged in it like a rat in a trap? And did n't she patch my broken bones, like a trained physician, when there was n't a man in a hundred miles that could have done it?"

"It is never wise to argue a point with a man in a fever, Mr. Burns. We can talk it out later on. See! Mamma has brought soap, fresh water, and towels. You could n't have a better nurse. You must let her bathe your face and hands and head."

"Won't you take her place, Daphne?"

Captain Ranger and Mrs. Benson were not listening or looking just then; and as for an instant their eyes met, the patient felt upon his fevered forehead the fluttering touch of a soft, cool hand.

"Delicious!" he whispered. "I shall get well now."

"Allow me," said Mrs. Benson, elbowing her daughter aside; "I am head nurse in this ward."

The patient groaned.

"The Captain says you ought to have been a man, Daphne," said Mrs. Benson, as her daughter yielded her place.

"If my father had lived to see this day, he would have rejoiced that I did n't allow my usefulness to run to waste because of my femininity. Of that I am as certain as that my patient is better."

"You are a disobedient and ungrateful girl, Daphne."

"You are my mamma."

"I am not to blame for that, Daphne."

"Am I?" asked the daughter, seriously. "I don't pretend to understand, and so of course cannot explain the cause that leads to individual being, mamma dear. I know, though, that I am; and if the time should ever come that I can know why I am, I shall understand why I am a woman. I cannot now see that anybody is to be blamed on account of the fact, or accident, of sex."

"You are to blame for being a thankless child, Daphne."

"I am neither a child nor thankless, mamma dear. I simply desire to be and act myself. You know I love and honor you; but I have learned, by sad experience, that each human being exists primarily for himself or herself; and not one of us can live for another. If I had been taught this truth in my childhood, we might both have been spared much suffering. But" — turning to her patient — "we have other duties. Your fever has fallen several degrees in the past fifteen minutes. I must go. When you want to rail at anybody, just pitch into me and let mamma have a rest. Jean will bring you some broth. I'll send Mrs. O'Dowd to sit with you sometimes, to give mamma a little liberty. You two have been forced to keep each other's company till you are both as cross as a pair of imprisoned cats."

"I believe I've been pursuing the wrong policy," said Mrs. Benson to the Captain, as they walked together on the burning sand. "If Daphne had been compelled to endure that patient's petulance for more than a week, as I have, she would have been as weary of the sight of him as I am."

"I am not so sure of that," replied the Captain, "seeing they're not married yet. Two cats will agree together like two doves, as long as they have their individual freedom; but if you tie 'em together, they'll fight like dogs and tigers."

"Poor little mamma! She's all tired out, so she is!" exclaimed Mrs. McAlpin, as she and her mother were walking out together after they had stopped for the night. "You must change places to-morrow with Mrs. O'Dowd. Then you can ride in Captain Ranger's big family wagon with the children and me, and get your much-needed rest."

"Do you mean to say that I shall ride in that widower's wagon, Daphne, and his wife only just buried? What would people say?"

"Why should you think or care what anybody says, so long as you do your duty, mamma? Captain Ranger is a gentleman. His heart is buried with his wife. Don't be a silly! Beg pardon, mamma. I did n't mean to be slangy or saucy. We've other troubles in store, and ought not to be quarrelling between ourselves. Do you know that Donald McAlpin is following, or at least shadowing, this train?"

Mrs. Benson blanched.

"Why do you think that, Daphne?"

"I've seen him twice since we met that colony of freighters. If he persists in his persecutions, I'll kill him!"

"Do not talk that way, child. People have been made innocent victims of the scaffold for having made threats which they never meant to and never did fulfil."

"I have nothing to say against him as a man. But before God he is not my husband, no matter what the law may have decreed, and I am living a lie when I permit the outrage. He would make you an agreeable husband, because you love him. I've known this for many a day. If I were dead or divorced, you could become his wife, and then you would both be happy. We are all miserable as it is."

"But think of the looks of it, daughter! What would people say?" Her eyes grew suddenly aglow with a

newly awakened hope, in spite of her demurrer, and her heart beat hard.

"Do you intend to do what you know to be right in the sight of God? or do you mean to remain a slave all the days of your life to the idle words of men and women who care nothing for you, and to whom you owe no allegiance? Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. At least, I so read the Scripture, which you say is your rule of faith and practice."

"But we owe allegiance to the English Church and to human law, my child."

"That is true; and I for one intend to obey the laws of man till they are amended, although I was allowed no voice in their construction. But, thanks to the progressive spirit of the age, we have divorce courts established almost everywhere throughout the civilized world, so anybody can obey the law and still 'to his own self be true.'"

"No divorce can be had in our church, Daphne, except for a nameless crime."

"That ruling is a relic of barbarism. I will see that the way is opened for both you and Donald to obey the law and be honest with yourselves also."

"But how about Mr. Burns? Does your rule apply to him?"

"We won't discuss that matter, mamma. Mr. Burns fully understands that I am not a free woman, and he has no right to discuss with me a question that I am not at liberty to consider. Although I despise the law that holds me in its thrall, I will obey it till it is annulled."

"You don't know what you're saying, child."

"Yes, I do, mamma. I have studied the law carefully. I shall obey it in everything I undertake."

"Don't you know that Rollin Burns is a pauper?"

"That's neither here nor there. The possible future relations between Mr. Burns and myself are neither supposable nor discussable under present conditions. What

a glorious world we live in!" she exclaimed, clinging to her mother's arm and pulling her along. "How happy everybody might become if everybody could afford to be honest!"

"But public opinion is a moral safeguard, my child."

"It has wellnigh made a lunatic of me," exclaimed the daughter, with a sigh. "I should have been in an insane asylum if I had not grown strong enough to defy the thing you call public opinion. Now please remember, mamma, you may meet Donald McAlpin at any time. I have told you that he was shadowing us. But you are not to recognize him so long as I am his lawful wife, or it will be the worse for all of us. God knows, I am anxious enough to set him free; and I'll do it as soon as the law will let me. 'All things come to him who waits.' Be hopeful, be trustful, be patient, mamma dear; and be sure 'your own will come to you.'"

A solitary horseman galloped past them and halted at the camp.

"It's Donald!" cried Mrs. Benson, nervously clutching her daughter's arm. "Why can't we speak to him, Daphne?"

"Come this way."

Reluctantly Mrs. Benson followed.

"Let's sit behind these rocks," said the daughter. "It is fortunate that I gave Captain Ranger his latest name. He knows him only as Donald McPherson."

They watched the two men parleying. Captain Ranger pointed toward the distant hills with one hand, and with the other was gesticulating vigorously.

"Will you promise not to let him recognize you while we are on this journey, mamma dear?"

"It would be an easy promise to make, my child, if I could know when, where, and under what circumstances we might meet again in the future."

XIX

A BRIEF MESSAGE FOR MRS. BENSON

"**W**E'LL not be able to advance another mile unless something can be done to cure the cattle's feet," exclaimed the Captain the next morning, when his teamsters came together for consultation.

"I have been studying the case during the night," said Mrs. McAlpin, who was preparing breakfast. "It is cool and pleasant now, but it will be terribly hot by nine o'clock. We must treat the sore feet of our sufferers to a heroic cure, and get them out on the range, away from the sand of the public road, before the sun gets over the hills. We can't drive a hoof over the road to-day."

"I'd like to know how in blazes we're going to doctor the cattle's feet without medicine," cried Hal. "We have n't even enough o' 'Number Six' on hand to give my off-leader's left foot a thorough treatment."

"I guess we have everything we need," replied the Little Doctor. "Bring me your fullest tar-bucket. There, that's encouraging. Got any turpentine, Captain? That's good. Now bring me an iron pot, Susanah. Here's a good bed of glowing coals. There," she cried, as she emptied the liquid tar into the iron kettle. "Now let's add the turpentine, and I'll heat the mixture as slowly as possible over these red-hot coals. It is fortunate that the flames are dead, otherwise we might set our dish on fire and spoil our broth. Have you any oakum?"

"Not a bit. Who'd 'a' thought we'd need oakum on a land-lubbers' journey like this?" said the Captain.

The Little Doctor knitted her brows. "Have you some Manila rope and a big pan?" she asked.

"We have mother's clothes-line, if that will do," said Jean.

"Yo' uns not gwine to empty dat stuff in my dish-pan, honey?" exclaimed Susannah, in indignant protest, as Mary was fetching the pan.

Mrs. McAlpin laughed.

The seething mixture was lifted dexterously from the coals in the nick of time to prevent an accident by fire. It was then emptied into the dish-pan and stirred to the consistency of blackstrap, — a commodity with which the wayfarers were familiar, — and pieces of the tarred rope were made ready for placing between the doctored hoofs.

"We 'll try our Little Doctor's remedy on Scotty's off-leader first," said Hal. "If it should kill him, there will be only one dead, and he's nearly dead anyhow."

The poor beast bellowed pitifully as his hoof was plunged into the almost scalding mixture; but like the lassoed victim of a branding iron, he could not get away, and each hoof received its treatment in its turn.

By the doctor's order, a tent had been cut into convenient patches; and the seared feet of the afflicted brute, after a liberal supply of the flour of sulphur had been added to the tar and turpentine, were securely wrapped with the pieces and bound with rope, to protect them from the dust and gravel of the roads.

By the time that each disabled animal had been subjected to this heroic treatment, it was long past noon, and the Captain decided to turn the teams back upon the range for the remainder of the day.

"May I take a ride on Sukie, daddie dear?" asked Jean. "I'll find good grass for her, and plenty of it."

"Yes, Jean. Take her to yonder ravine, where you see a clump of cottonwoods. You'll be pretty sure to find some tender grass at their roots."



Jean leaped nimbly to the saddle and cantered leisurely away.

Suddenly a bronzed and handsome horseman rode up beside her and lifted his hat, — a large sombrero, surmounting a pair of square shoulders that sported a gay serape.

"Good-morning, little miss. Or would you call it afternoon? I had stopped under the cottonwoods to graze my horse, and I could n't resist the temptation to accost you. Going to California?"

"No; to Oregon."

"A God-forsaken country that. Rains thirteen months in every year."

"Have you ever been there?"

The stranger shook his head. "I've had rain enough in England to do me for the rest of my life."

"A little of the Oregon rains we've read about would be a godsend if we could have it now," said Jean, mopping her perspiring face with the curtain of her sun-bonnet, and glancing ruefully at the brazen sky.

"May I ride beside you for a little distance?"

"If we keep in sight of the wagons, sir."

"You're not afraid of me, I hope?"

He was close beside her now, so close he could have grasped her bridle-rein.

"Afraid? Of course not. I am not afraid of any gentleman."

"Do you belong to yonder camp?"

"Yes, sir."

"And there are two ladies travelling with you, — a widow and her daughter?"

"There are a grass widow and a nigger, sir."

"Now see here, little one," and his voice grew harsh and loud, "you've been coached; that's evident. Don't be frightened. I don't mean to harm you. But I am no longer deceived. Will you do me a favor?"

He was reading her face anxiously.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"Will you carry a note for me to Mrs. Benson?"

"I don't know, sir. See! They're bringing in the cattle. I must hurry back to camp."

"Wait a little, miss. I must write a note."

"I have n't promised to give it to anybody, sir."

"But you'll do it," he said, thrusting a few hastily written, unsealed lines into her hand. "Give that to the young lady's mother. I feel that I can trust you. Here's a dollar. You will not read the note, nor say a word about it to any one?"

"You can trust me, sir, but I do not want your dollar."

"Keep it, child."

He wheeled and was gone. She watched him disappear in a cloud of dust, and hid the note away in the bosom of her dress.

"He trusted me, and I won't read it, though I'd be glad to know its contents," she whispered to herself. "Why does Fate make me the depositary of other people's affairs and then burden me with secrecy? I'm only an ignorant girl; but I know enough about the secrets of more than one of our fellow-travellers to explode bombs in several directions if I'd tell!"

"I am overjoyed at the success of my first practice as a veterinary doctor," said Mrs. McAlpin the next day.

"We're all glad," said the Captain. "Small use any man would have for this world if it were n't for the women to help him out under difficulties."

"Poor Captain! How he misses his wife!" she thought, as she sought the wagon where Scotty lay.

"I'd get well a great deal faster if I had you for a nurse, Daphne," he said appealingly.

"Nature is doing her best for you. She's mending your bones thoroughly. If we patched you up in too big a hurry, we'd soon be in trouble again."

"But I feel like a chained eagle, lying here."

"Captain Ranger is making you a pair of crutches, Mr. Burns. You'll soon be out again on your well foot, if you obey orders. Where's mamma?"

"In the shadow of the wagon, yonder."

Mrs. Benson was resting in the shade, indulging in a silent reverie. "Are all the teachings of my life to be overthrown?" she said, as she thrust a note into her pocket and buried her face in her hands. "Can it be true that Daphne was right and I was wrong? What will people say? Daphne has good principles, but she's as unsentimental as a Mandan squaw. She has no more romance in her make-up than black Susannah. Yet," and a fluttering hope welled up in her heart, "she's a true and faithful daughter. I would to Heaven that all the people in the world were as good."

She produced her treasured note again, and read it stealthily.

"Yes, yes! it can be managed, and none of the curious will ever be the wiser," she said, after due reflection. "It is indeed fortunate that he's been compelled by the law of entail to take his mother's name. Nobody will know him in Oregon."

Mrs. McAlpin found Scotty at camping time with a voracious appetite and a temper like a caged bear.

"Where have you kept yourself through all this blistering afternoon?" he asked, munching his food heartily.

"I can't stay with all my patients all the time, Mr. Burns, especially as so many of them are quadrupeds, with the hoof-ail."

"I suppose, then, that I am to be classed as a biped, with the leg-ail."

"Exactly."

"Ouch! oh!" he exclaimed with a grimace, as the knitting bones gave a sudden twinge, reminding him that they were awake and on duty. "These infernal bandages are loose again, I hope."

"Your bandages are doing nicely, sir. The Captain

will have your crutches ready in a day or two. Then you can take some exercise."

"What have you done with those hideous black garments, Daphne?"

"Do you like these gray ones better?"

"Yes, I like the gray ones better."

"So does this abounding dust. My black clothes were getting rusty, so I made a contribution of them to the water nymphs of the Platte."

"Why did you wear those weeds?"

"They served my purpose, sir."

"You almost provoke me into profanity, Mrs. McAlpin; you are so mysteriously non-committal."

"Glad to hear it. Men don't feel like swearing when death is staring them in the face."

"Your supper is getting cold, and Mrs. Benson says you must hurry up." The intruder, as usual, was Jean.

"I will see you later, Mr. Burns," said Mrs. McAlpin, and she ran away, laughing.

"You seem very happy this evening, mamma," she said, as with cup and plate in hand she seated herself on a wagon-tongue.

Mrs. Benson blushed. "Why don't you eat?" she asked, evading her daughter's question.

"I hardly know. But I am out of sorts. Just think of men coming out on a journey like this, with ailing wives and unborn children, with no adequate preparation for their needs! I left one woman, less than two hours ago, with newly born twins, and a yearling squalling like mad at the foot of her bed. The mother was as docile as a kitten, and a hundred times more helpless."

"Where was the father?"

"Oh, he was shambling around, helpless and in the way. He was kindness personified; but he was as useless as a monkey. When woman's true history shall have been written, her part in the upbuilding of this nation will astound the world. I've seen heroines on this jour-

ney who far outrank the Alexanders, Washingtons, and Napoleons of any of our school histories. Yonder's a herald coming to announce another case! Will you accompany me, mamma? I can ask Captain Ranger to stay with Mr. Burns."

"Not to-night, Daphne. I am very tired. And you know I have no patience with a woman doctor, anyway. Women were seen and not heard when I was a girl."

XX

THE TEAMSTERS DESERT

"**Y**OU seem to be in trouble, my little man. What can I do to help you?" asked the Little Doctor, as a shocky-headed, freckle-faced child, ragged, barefoot, and dirty, paused in her presence, balancing himself first on one foot and then on the other, and occasionally rubbing his eyes with a grimy shirt-sleeve, open at the wrist and badly out at elbow.

"I hearn tell that you was a doctor, mum. Can you come to see my mam? She's sick, awful."

The child led the way to a rickety wagon, which had halted at an inconvenient distance from the creek, in the blazing sunshine, though a friendly tree stood near that might have afforded a grateful shade for an hour or more if the head of the family had thought to stop the wagon in the right spot before unhitching his team. Three or four sallow, barefoot, and ragged little children were playing in the sand. The scant remains of a most uninviting repast littered the ground. A half-dozen hungry dogs, tied to the wagon-wheels, out of reach of the poor remains of food, whined piteously.

A loose-jointed man shambled aimlessly about, wiping his tear-stained face on the buttonless sleeve of a very

dirty shirt. "She's got the cholera, an' she'll die, an' thar'll be nobody left to keer fur her young uns!" he sobbed within hearing of the writhing patient.

"When did this suffering begin?" asked the Little Doctor, trying hard not to smile.

"Nigh on to half a day ago, mum. I druv like hell to git to this 'ere crick. I'd hearn of it afore I left the last camp."

"Have you a tent?"

"Lawd, no! nor nothin' else to speak of."

"But dogs and children!" the visitor thought, as she ruefully surveyed the scene.

"The steers have got the foot-rot. Kin you kore 'em?"

"Yes, but we must first attend to the needs of your wife. Go to Captain Ranger. Tell him I sent you. Tell him I must borrow one of his tents and some physic and a bottle of 'Number Six.' Ask for Mrs. O'Dowd, and be sure to say that Mrs. McAlpin wants her badly."

When Captain Ranger and his man Limpy appeared on the scene, bringing the tent and medicines, water was already boiling in a black iron kettle, the only cooking utensil in sight. The tent was soon pitched, and a bed prepared for the sufferer, who was writhing in convulsions.

"Any woman accustomed to the comforts of a well-ordered home would have died," said Mrs. McAlpin the next morning, after the crisis was past. "But the average specimen of the poor white trash of the original slave States has as many lives as a cat."

"I did n't have no doctor," said the patient, as soon as she was able to be on her feet. "Thar was a woman yar, an' she giv' me some hot truck, but I jist kored myself."

The woman was telling her story to a visitor, who had called, partly from sympathy, but chiefly from curiosity; and Mrs. McAlpin, who was assisting Captain Ranger

to compound the mixture for the ailing feet of the stranger's cattle, overheard the shrill-voiced visitor add, "I never did take no stock in them women doctors."

"I wanted water," continued the patient, "an' could n't git none; so I waited till nobody was watchin' and jist stole out o' the tent in the night an' swallered all I could hol' from a canteen; and I mended from the word 'go.' The stuff was as warm as dish-water, but I wanted it so bad I did n't stop to taste it."

All day the convalescent wrestled with weakness; but as the afflicted cattle could not go forward till the following morning, she moved languidly about the camp and fed her family with beans and bacon, with the never-failing accompaniment of black coffee, which Captain Ranger declared was "strong enough to bear up an iron wedge."

The scenery became more diversified as the travellers continued their journey up the Platte. Gradually the heat became less suffocating. Desert sands gave way to alluvial valleys, and the health of man and beast improved. On the opposite, or south side of the river, the scenery was strikingly unlike that of the plain through which the emigrant road ran, winding its sinewy length in and out, over the vast, untilled fields that lay asleep in the sunshine, awaiting the fructifying power of the autumn rains, and the future labor of plough and seedsman.

It was now the first of July. The heavy duties of the day were over, the short summer evening had come, and Captain Ranger lay upon the grass, playing with his own little ones, Susannah's George Washington, and the three babies of Sally O'Dowd.

The evening breezes stirred his hair and beard and filled his lungs with a sensation of vigor he had not enjoyed since bidding farewell to his faithful wife.

"The story goes that some prospectors have discovered gold in the foot-hills across the big drink," said Yank,

approaching the Captain with a sort of half-military salute.

"What of it?" asked the Captain, as he shook himself loose from the little group, and arose to his knees, a vague fear tugging at his heart. "What does such a discovery mean to us?"

"Nothing; only the most of us are going to throw up our job and go off a-prospecting."

"What! and leave me alone in this wilderness, without teamsters, a thousand miles from nowhere, with all these women and children on my hands to starve to death or be captured by Indians?"

"That 'll have to be your own lookout, I reckon. The gold fever's as sudden as the cholera, and takes you off without warning when you get it bad."

"What's the matter, daddie?" asked Jean. "Are you sick?"

"I'm face to face with an awful difficulty, daughter. Our ox-drivers have caught the gold fever. They are all going to leave us in this wilderness but Scotty; and he'd go too, no doubt, if he were n't crippled and helpless."

"Don't let the desertion of your teamsters worry you," exclaimed Sally O'Dowd. "I can drive one of the teams myself."

"What! You?"

"Yes! Did n't I tell you that you'd never be sorry if you'd let me travel in your train to Oregon?"

"We can all drive oxen," cried his three daughters, in a breath.

"But who will drive for Mrs. Benson and the Little Doctor? Their teamsters have joined the stampede, and they can't drive oxen."

"Just try us and see if we can't," laughed the Little Doctor.

"But you have two teams, and your mother cannot drive one of them."

"I'll make a trailer of one of the wagons, just as the freighters do in the Assiniboin country."

"Does Mrs. Benson know about this?"

"Yes; we've talked it all over. It's a genuine case of 'have to,' Captain."

"What will you do with Scotty?"

"We've considered him! He'll soon be on his feet again. Meanwhile, he'll have to stay on in his hammock."

"He's not good for anything there nor anywhere else!" said the Captain, testily. "He does n't know beans about driving oxen, and I doubt if he can ever learn!"

"He's great on 'intervention' and 'non-intervention,' though," laughed Mrs. McAlpin. "He's even greater on the Monroe Doctrine."

"Yes!" exclaimed Jean, "and you ought to hear him rave over the nation's allegiance to Mason and Dixon's Line. It's on the troubles over the slavery question, which he says are looming all along the national horizon, that he comes out strong."

"He's taught me a lot about law and equity, courts and criminals, constitutions and codes," said Hal.

"You make light of the peril of our situation because you do not comprehend its gravity," exclaimed Captain Ranger. "We need our teamsters. Scotty is a capital theorist, but he'll never set a river afire."

"That's a feat you've never accomplished yet, daddie," laughed Jean.

"I've come as near it as any living man; for I boiled the Illinois dry once!" replied the Captain, alluding to an experience of a former year of drouth, when a steam sawmill he was operating on the river-bank had to be closed down for a season for want of water.

"Don't worry, Captain," cried Sally O'Dowd. "The women and children won't forsake you."

"Because they can't," was the curt response, and he walked away to be alone.

The next morning, the teamsters, notwithstanding the strike, were standing around the camp-fires, waiting for breakfast. Some of them looked a little ashamed, some were a little concerned as to the fate of the train, and two or three seemed to enjoy the Captain's predicament.

"Clear out, every last one of you!" he exclaimed, as they made a move for the mess-boxes as soon as breakfast was ready. "The women folks are my teamsters now, and they shall have the first seats at my table."

As the men turned away, crestfallen and hungry, their resolution to "get rich quick" began to drop toward zero; but their leader and spokesman hurried them away, explaining that they would find a trading-post and plenty of "grub" across the river.

Mrs. McAlpin paused to visit Scotty a moment at his hammock; and as Mrs. Benson was busy with some duties at the fire, the couple were alone.

"Why these groanings, Mr. Burns?" she asked, placing her cool hand upon his corrugated forehead.

"Because I'm a fool!"

"Did anybody ever dispute it?" she asked with a silvery laugh. "There! Not another word. You are my patient, remember. You must n't talk back."

"Your touch is the touch of an angel."

"Did you ever see an angel?"

"I'm *vis-à-vis* with one this holy minute. Ouch! Confound that pain!"

"I thought you enjoyed my surgery. You said you did."

"I have just said I was a fool."

"Did I dispute it?"

He laughed in spite of his pain. "Say, Little Doctor, are you never going to let me talk it out?"

"Talk what out?"



"Our personal affairs."

"Not yet. You must be patient. I am not a free woman yet."

"But you'll let me hope?"

"I cannot say. I am determined to obey the letter of the law."

"I could leap for joy, Daphne!"

"Better not try it; might injure your knitting-bones."

"Here," said Mrs. Benson, who had been purposely busy at the fire, "is a dish of savory stew. And here is some hardtack, soaked till it is light and soft. It is hot and nicely buttered. The coffee is guiltless of cream, but it is fresh and good."

"And black and aromatic and Frenchy," exclaimed Scotty. "Mrs. McAlpin, will you dine with me to-day?"

"No, Mr. Burns; my meal awaits me at the fire."

"What sort of game is this?" he asked, as he ate with relish.

"Captain Ranger called it a prairie bird."

"Birds in my country don't wear hair, but feathers," he said, holding to the light the hind-quarter of a prairie dog, and pointing to bits of hair afloat in the gravy.

"Ask me no questions, for conscience' sake," cried Mrs. Benson, who was laughing heartily. "It may be a prairie dog, or it may be a prairie squirrel. But it is good for food, and much to be desired to make you well and wise."

"It is all right," laughed Mrs. McAlpin. "When Lewis and Clark were on the Oregon trail, nearly fifty years ago, away yonder to the north of us, they were glad to trade with the Indians for mangy dogs, sometimes, if they got any food at all."

When Scotty awoke the following morning, after a sleep that was as refreshing as it seemed brief, the sun was creeping over the wide expanse of the Platte, making it shine like a gigantic mirror. The women and girls, who had been up for an hour, were bringing in the stock.

Susannah, who had been detailed to cook the breakfast and mind the children, was baking flapjacks, and the aroma of coffee was in the air.

"We can all eat at the first table now," said Jean, as they knelt around the mess-boxes.

Before the repast was finished, they were surprised to see the men who had left them for the gold mines reappear at camp, looking cheap and ashamed.

Sawed-off was the first to speak. "We talked it over with Brownson and Jordan, and the four of us concluded that we could n't desert you, Captain. So the rest of 'em joined in."

"I reckon you got hungry," said the Captain, dryly.

"No, Captain. It was n't hunger; it was conscience that sent us back."

"How much cash can you put up as collateral, if I conclude to trust you again?"

The crestfallen men were silent.

"Seeing the risk is all mine, and all the provisions and other parts of the entire outfit are mine, and you are foot-loose and can play quits at any time, I guess we'd better not make any new deal. My gals and these widders can help drive the teams."

The self-discharged teamsters withdrew beyond hearing of the camp, and parleyed long and earnestly.

"We've got to do something!" exclaimed Sawed-off. "Just watch them gals handle them cattle! They've the true grit."

"Do you s'pose the Cap'n 'd take us back if we'd pungle say fifty dollars apiece?" asked Limpy.

"We can't do better than make the offer," said Yank.

"This cash'll come handy at the other end of the line," said the Captain, intrusting the gold to the care of his daughters and reinstating his men, after a sharp exhortation to avoid repeating the offence.

XXI

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

"O H, this wonderful Western country!" wrote Jean in her diary, under date of midnight, July 4. "After travelling so long on the banks of the Platte that we had come to look upon it as a familiar friend, we left it to the southward and turned our course up the valley of the Sweet Water, through a succession of low, wooded hills. This little river, though not more than a hundred feet wide, is quite deep, and runs like a mill-race. The water is as clear as ether, and agreeably cold.

"Nobody can conceive the vastness of this country, or imagine its future possibilities, until he has crossed the great unsettled part of this continent to the westward and seen it for himself.

"Some days we move for many hours over great stretches of alluvial soil, which only needs the impulse of cultivation to make it yield of the fruits of the earth like magic. Again, we are in the midst of big fields of crude saleratus, or salt, or sulphur. Now and then our cattle are compelled to wade through an alkali swamp, suggesting more foot-ail; but our Little Doctor says that danger is past for this year; she has not stated why, and maybe she does n't know.

"We encamped last night near Independence Rock, — a huge pile of gray basalt, covering an area of perhaps ten acres, and looking to be about three hundred feet high. Its sides are formed of great irregular bowlders, worn smooth by the warring elements of ages.

"July 5. Yesterday was Independence Day, and as

we had camped near Independence Rock, daddie laid over to celebrate.

"About noon, Mary, Marjorie, and I concluded that we would climb the rock to its summit, carrying with us the only star-spangled banner the train could boast. But our scheme failed through the fickleness and fury of the same elements that have been smoothing the surface of the rock during the ages gone.

"We had climbed over halfway to the top when a low, dense cloud, as blue-black as a kettle of indigo dye, enveloped us. It came upon us so suddenly that we hardly realized our danger till we were surrounded by semi-darkness in the midst of a pelting hailstorm. We retreated so blindly and hastily that it is a miracle we did n't break our necks.

"Thunder and lightning followed, or rather accompanied the hail, and were succeeded by a deluge of rain. Sudden squalls of wind would fairly lift us off our feet at times as we hurried downward, making the descent doubly perilous. But the storm soon spent its fury, leaving the air as clear and sweet as a chime of bells.

"A roaring fire welcomed us at camp, by which we warmed our chilled marrow-bones and dried our sodden toggery.

"Daddie scolded; Mame charged our mishap all to me; Marj blamed both of us, and excused herself. It is the way of the world, or of most people in it, but it is sometimes very provoking. I had n't thought of attempting the climb till the other girls proposed it; but I took the brunt of the blame, and, as usual, got all the scolding.

"The storm would n't let us try to float the flag, but it got very wet, and we had our labor for our pains.

"Sally and Susannah prepared a Fourth of July banquet of antelope steaks, to go with our regulation diet of beans and coffee. After dinner Mrs. McAlpin sang 'The Star-Spangled Banner,' the rest of us joining in the chorus. Susannah sang a lot of negro melodies, and

George Washington danced for us, his white teeth shining, and eyeballs gleaming. Hal read the Declaration of Independence, and daddie 'made the eagle scream.'

"He was in the midst of his oration, and I was wondering where all the men of valor came from, seeing they had had no mothers to assist in getting up this spread-eagle scheme we call a republic, when I was compelled to leave the crowd and poise myself on a wet wagon-tongue to write the thing up. Scotty, who is still on crutches, delivered an oration on the side, of which I heard but little, owing to my banishment.

"But I won't always be so meek and silent on the Fourth of July. I'll write a Declaration of Independence for women some day.

"Daddie burned some powder after dark, 'to amuse the children,' he said, but I noticed that the men enjoyed the noise even more than the children did. Poor Bobbie got some powder burns about the face, and Sadie and the babies gave us a squalling chorus, prompted by fright, causing me to wonder why men must always celebrate our patriotism with the emblems of death and destruction."

On July 6 she wrote: "We have reached the edges of the Rocky Mountains now; and as we climb slowly and almost imperceptibly toward their summits, our road winds in and out along the meandering bases of a great divide, down which many little streams of icy water dash with foam and roar, forever in a hurry, always trying to go somewhere, and never reaching any settled goal.

"Now and then we get glimpses of distant summits, but we are reaching them by an ascent so gradual that daddie says we shall not realize that we have crossed the great divide till we see the water has changed its course from east to west.

"We passed a trading-post to-day, belonging to a company having its headquarters at Salt Lake. The men in charge wore big sombreros, buckskin trousers, and

moccasins of buffalo hide. They all smoked incessantly and affected the airs of the genus cowboy, or *vaquero* of the plains, of whom we often see specimens roving over hill and plain on horseback, their shoulders covered with gayly colored serapes, flapping in the wind like wings.

"We pass daily from six to a dozen graves, but not so newly made as those noticed heretofore; so we conclude the cholera is abating.

"There, old Journal! I've done my level best to write you up to date. But it's like climbing these mountains, — uphill work, and dreadfully monotonous!"

"Did you buy a fresh stock of provisions, Captain?" asked Sally O'Dowd, as they were preparing to leave the trading-post which Jean had mentioned, after he had held a long parley with a big, bronzed, and heavily bearded mountaineer, who was strikingly handsome despite his peculiar make-up.

"Yes, Sally. I bought a couple o' hundred pounds o' flour, for which I paid a twenty-dollar gold-piece."

"I was feeding the children, and did n't get a chance to make my purchases at the proper time. Won't you hold the teams back a few minutes for me?"

"Yes, but hurry up."

"Let me have a hundred pounds of flour, sir," she said, approaching the counter, behind which the trader stood, smoking a huge meerschaum.

"Anything else?"

"Yes; the balance of this twenty-dollar gold-piece in dried peaches, please."

In filling her order, the trader raised the cloth partition of the tent to reach his base of supplies, and in the middle of the tent Sally espied an unkempt squaw and half-a-dozen dusky children.

"I'll be compelled to hurry," she said, as he leisurely weighed her fruit. "Captain Ranger is always demanding haste."

The trader started suddenly, his face blanching.

"Where does your train hail from?" he asked.

"From the middle West, sir. We are going from the West to the West." The trader balanced two sacks of Salt Lake flour on his shoulders, and grasping the smaller package of peaches, strode out hurriedly toward the wagon near which Captain Ranger was standing, impatient to be gone.

"These purchases are for the lady, sir. Where will you have them dumped?"

"Any place where there's room, and don't let any grass grow under your feet!"

"The lady tells me your name is Ranger, sir."

"Yes. What of it?"

"Will you walk with me a little way ahead of the wagons? I have something important to say to you alone."

"We are scarce of drivers," replied the Captain, hesitating. "Two of my men are out hunting."

"I can drive," exclaimed Jean, reaching for the whip, which she handled with the skill of a freighter, finishing her flourishes with a series of snaps at the end of a deerskin cracker, like the explosion of a bunch of fire-crackers.

"If we'll take this cut-off, we'll come out a mile or more ahead of the wagons," said the trader. "Then we can rest by the roadside till they catch up."

The Captain strode by his side in silence.

"Don't you know me, John?" asked the stranger, grasping him by the arm, and speaking in a hoarse whisper.

Captain Ranger eyed him earnestly, his cheeks paling.

"Can it be possible that you are — Joe?" he asked, seizing his hand with a vise-like grip.

"I am indeed your brother Joe, — an outlaw, now and always."

"No, you are not an outlaw; the fellow over whom

you got into that trouble is alive and well. You'd have got out of that scrape all right if you had n't jumped your bail and left all the rest of us in the lurch. Why did n't you stand your trial, like a man?"

John Ranger's feelings overcame him, and he sank upon the ground, filled with old-time memories. He buried his face in his hands. Time and distance faded away, and he saw, with eyes of memory, the gentle, fading face of his toiling, uncomplaining wife, whose life had been for years a sacrifice to penury through the debt entailed by this brother's cowardice.

"Do you mean to tell me that Elmer Edson is not dead?"

The question called him back to present conditions with a sudden start.

"Elmer Edson is not dead, but Annie Ranger is!" he said hoarsely. "We had to leave her precious dust in the ground away back yonder in the Black Hills. We started together on this terrible journey, hoping to escape the consequences of that awful mortgage with which you left us in the lurch. She had denied herself many comforts and all the luxuries of life for a dozen years to feed the ever-eating cankerworm of interest. No, Joe, you did n't kill Edson; but through my efforts to help you out of a trouble in which you should never have been entangled, you became accessory to the lingering death of my wife."

"Don't reproach me, John! I loved Annie like a sister. I did indeed. She was a sister to me from the day she became your wife. You don't or won't see how it grieves me to hear of her death."

"Why did n't you write to us, like a man?"

The brother had risen to his feet, and was pacing nervously to and fro, whittling aimlessly on a bit of sagebrush.

"I was afraid to write. There was a price upon my head, as you have no need to be informed."

"Yes, Joe; and to pay the interest on that price was the bane of my existence for a dozen years. But you can write now. Our dear mother — God bless her! — would forget all the terrible past if she could hold you in her arms once more. It is your duty to return at once, and settle, as well as you can, for the trouble you have caused. You ought at least to lift that accursed mortgage from the farm, and let Lije Robinson and Sister Mary and our parents spend the remainder of their lives in peace. You are a free man, and can go where you please."

"But I am not a free man, John. Even with that horrible load off my shoulders, I still am bound, hand and foot."

"Are you married, Joe?"

"Yes, John. You see, when a fellow is in hiding among the Indians, with a price set upon his head, and is therefore afraid to go home, he's nothing but a fugitive from justice; he expects to spend his life there, and never see the face of another white woman; and when there are scores of pretty Indian girls in sight —"

John Ranger jumped to his feet, his fists clinched and his eyes glaring.

"You don't mean to tell me that my brother is married to — to a — squaw?"

There was ineffable scorn in his tone and manner. It was now Joe's turn to sink upon the ground and bury his face in his hands. When he again looked at his brother, there was an expression of age and anguish upon his face which had not been there before.

"I am the husband of an Indian woman, and the father of seven half-breed children," he said with the air of a guilty man on trial for his life. "But there are extenuating circumstances, John. My wife was no common squaw. If you care for me at all, you will not apply that epithet to the mother of my children. She was the daughter of a Mandan chief, who had large dealings with the Hudson Bay Company, and who sent her to England

to be educated. You'd hardly think it to see her now, though; for the Indian women fall back into aboriginal customs when they leave the haunts of civilization to return to their people and take up life, especially as mothers, among their own kind and kin. At least, that is what Wahnetta did."

John Ranger groaned. "My God! has it come to this?" he cried, looking the picture of despair.

"If you had been in my place, you would have married her yourself, John. Nobody has a right to judge another; for no one knows what he will do till he is tried."

"Don't you regret the marriage, Joe?"

"It is too late for regrets. The deed is done, and I cannot get away from my fate. Shall we part as friends and brothers? Or is there an impassable gulf between us?"

There was an unspoken appeal in his tone, far stronger than words, which John Ranger remembered for many a day. But he refused his brother's proffered hand, and said hoarsely, as he sprang to his feet: "Don't, at your peril, let anybody know that you are my brother!"

He wheeled upon his heel and was gone.

XXII

THE SQUAW MAN

CAPTAIN RANGER overtook his train at a late hour, still nursing his towering wrath. His face was livid, and his breathing stertorous. Snatching the ox-whip from the hands of Jean and frightening the discouraged cattle into the semblance of an attempt at hurry by the cruel vehemence with which he belabored their lash-beflecked hides, he urged them forward, never once relaxing his attacks with the whip till he had rushed

them over the uneven road and rocks for six or seven miles.

"Daddie is in a terrible tantrum over something very unusual," said Jean. "Do you know what is the matter?" she asked aside, addressing Sally O'Dowd.

"No, Jean; unless he had some hot words with that post-trader. I know he thought ten dollars a hundred for flour was robbery. And think of a dollar a pound for dried peaches!"

"Daddie's not idiot enough to work himself into a fever over a trifle like that," answered Jean. "But suppose he has been thrown into a passion by anybody, the poor half-sick and half-famished oxen ought not to be punished for it. He reminds me of an old Kentucky slave-owner who got so mad because one of his sons failed to pass his first exams at West Point that he went out, as soon as he heard about it, and cruelly whipped a nigger." And falling back to the family team, beside which Hal was trudging, whip in hand, striving to keep the jaded cattle close behind his father's oxen, she dropped hastily on one knee on the wagon-tongue and climbed nimbly to a seat.

"That trader is still sitting by the roadside," she cried to Sally, who was trudging through the sand. "He's digging the earth with a jack-knife or dirk, or some other sharp implement, and seems quite as savage and out of humor as daddie. Wonder what daddie said to him."

One by one the wagons passed the solitary trader, who had climbed to a low ledge of rocks, where he sat as silent as the sun. His knife had fallen to the ground and lay glittering at his feet. His broad sombrero shaded his face.

The sudden rebound from the great happiness that had been his when first informed that he was not a murderer and an outlaw, to the abject position of a spurned and degraded "squaw man" seemed more than he could bear. "I am not a murderer, though, and that's some comfort,"

he moaned. "But I am still a Pariah, — an outcast from my own people. What will my dear mother think of me when John acquaints her with the facts? What will my father say or do?"

It is well that Mother Nature, in her wisdom and mercy, has provided a limit to human suffering, else everybody in this world would at times become insane.

Cicadas gave forth their rasping notes in the dry grass, and a colony of prairie dogs played hide-and-seek over the uneven streets above an underground settlement hard by. A badger peeped cautiously from the mouth of his sagebrush-guarded den, and a rattlesnake crawled unnoticed past his feet.

"I don't blame John for being disappointed and angry," he said aloud, "but I am amazed at his lack of charity. If he could have seen and known Wahnetta as I did, at the time of our marriage, he would have been pleased with my choice. But it is too late now. Her girlish grace and beauty are gone, and one could hardly distinguish her from any of the other pappoose-burdened, camas-digging squaws that abound in spots in the land of the Latter-Day Saints. I might send her back, with the children, to the remnant of her tribe among the Bad Lands, but the act would be infamous. No, Joseph Ranger; you must take your medicine."

He thought of his joyous exultation at the time he had won the accomplished and graceful Indian princess, whom half-a-dozen distinguished braves and as many handsome white traders had sought in marriage; of her trusting preference for him; of their joyous honeymoon; and of the herd of beautiful horses with which he had purchased her for his chosen bride, thus making her a slave. He winced as he thought of the legal status of his wife and children.

He blushed with shame as he thought of her loyalty to him through all the years of her transformation from a lithe and pretty maiden of sixteen, whom every man

admired, to the shapeless and slovenly specimen of her people, of whom he was now ashamed. He thought bitterly yet lovingly of the numerous children she had borne him uncomplainingly, while wandering from place to place in quest of roots and berries to save them from starvation in their early married years, when game would be scarce and his fickle fortunes had vanished for months at a stretch.

He remembered with what loving pride he had named his first two children John and Annie, in honor of the brother and sister for whom his heart had so often hungered. "And the end is this!" he cried, noting with a start that the sun was down. "Why did I name them John and Annie? I might have known better. I was a fool. And yet why should they be spurned on account of their Indian blood? If, instead of marrying Wahnetta, I had refused to make her my lawful wife, would my white relations have spurned me now?"

His childhood days passed and repassed before his mental vision like a panorama.

His family had been proud of him. What sacrifices they had made to send him to college, and with what base ingratitude he had repaid their loyalty and love! He had worse than wasted his opportunities, he thought, as he gazed abroad over the mighty landscape, bounded on the one hand by the wide basin of the receded and still slowly receding waters of Great Salt Lake, and on the other by the Rocky Mountains, — so near that they obstructed his vision, though he well knew their extent and majesty. "This won't do!" cried the wretched man, as he started homeward, reeling like a drunken man.

"Papa!" cried a childish voice. "Do hurry home! We are so hungry! Where have you been for so long?"

"All right, Johnnie; I'm coming. Papa forgot."

In a large military tent, or annex, at the rear end of the trader's tent sat Wahnetta, his wife. He shuddered

at the thought. And yet why should he? Was she not as good as he? Had all her years of faithful servitude counted for nothing?

A meal of boiled buffalo meat and vegetables, with bread, coffee, butter, and eggs, was waiting on a table of rough boards resting on trestles, and covered with an oilcloth that had once been white.

In one corner, beside a big sheet-iron cook-stove, sat, or rather crouched, the woman whom he had made his wife. She was not yet thirty years of age, but all traces of her girlish youth and beauty of face and figure were gone. Her dress, a cheap and garish print, was open at the neck and arms, and hung in slovenly folds about her fat form and moccasined feet.

"Why in thunder don't you keep yourself and the young ones clean and dressed up?" asked her husband, as he dropped into his seat at table. "You keep yourself like a Digger squaw!"

"I should belie the customs of my people if I aped the airs of white folks when I must live like an Indian, Joseph Addicks!" said the woman, in well-modulated English, as she arose and approached the table, coffee-pot in hand.

"I loathe and abhor the very sight of you!" he exclaimed with a savage glare.

"You did n't talk like that when I was young and pretty, Joseph! If you had tried it once, you would not have had a chance to repeat it then. Perhaps," she added bitterly, a moment later, as she filled his plate, "perhaps I could have retained my charms if you had taken me back to London and kept me within the pale of civilization in which I was educated. You said before you married me that you would take me back to Canada, where you said your people lived, who would be glad to welcome me. How well you have kept your promise let these surroundings answer. I married you believing that your people would be my people, and your God my God. And," looking around her, "this is the result!"

The sleeves of her gaudy dress were rolled back above the elbows, exposing her fat yet muscular arms, not over-clean; and the dingy pipe she had been smoking protruded from the open bosom of her gown.

"Where have you been during all this busy afternoon, Joseph?" she asked, still standing.

"To hell!"

"Your missionaries have taught me that people only go to hell from choice, Joseph; that is, if there is any worse hell anywhere than we are in all the time, — which I love the Great Spirit too well to believe. It seems to me we are compelled to take the punishment we bring upon ourselves here and now."

"You have n't any right to think, you loathsome, disgusting —"

"Stop, Joseph Addicks! This is, you say, a white man's country now. Will you prove it by behaving yourself like a gentleman? I did n't live for four years in a white man's country for nothing."

He arose and left the table without a word. His wife had seen him in moods like this before.

"Come, John; come, Annie; take your seats at table. You must be half famished."

Four or five smaller children as dusky as herself were playing on the earthen floor; and, leaning helplessly against a pyramid of flour sacks, lashed in Indian style to its birchen cradle, was a pappoose of three months, defencelessly enduring an attack of mosquitoes on its face and eyes.

"My father was a fool for sending me to college," thought Joseph Ranger, who, like many others that go wrong, was ready to blame everything and everybody except himself. "The university should have stopped that hazing before it began, so I could n't have had that fracas."

"Why did n't you eat your dinner, Joseph?" asked his wife, after she had fed the children.

"Because I hate this accursed life too heartily to have any appetite for food."

"Have n't I always urged you to go with us back to civilization, Joseph?"

"With you for a wife? You don't know what you are talking about."

Then — but it was not the first time since Wahnetta had become his property by purchase — he fired himself up with the vile whiskey his company held in stock, and, taking advantage of the English common law, at that time an acknowledged authority in every State and Territory in the Union, he provided himself with a stick, no thicker than his thumb, and beat Wahnetta, his wife, long and brutally.

Captain Ranger had allowed his anger to cool before the sun went down. To his credit be it spoken, he was very much ashamed of himself. "I was like an enraged, unreasoning animal," he exclaimed aloud. "I might at least have repulsed Joe with kindness. I will write to my father and mother and tell them that my brother who was lost is alive and is found. But I'll say nothing about the domestic side of his history. It would only grieve them all, and they could n't help matters. It is none of my business, anyhow."

But he could not sleep. The memory of his and Joseph's boyhood days reproached him, and he thought lovingly, in spite of himself, of the younger brother of whom he had been so proud. Many incidents of their childhood, long forgotten, passed before him with startling vividness.

"Joe saved my life once," he said, half audibly. "I would have been drowned as sure as fate, when I broke through the ice that day, if he had n't saved me at the risk of his own life. Dear boy! I'll saddle Sukie and go back to see him in the morning." With this resolution settled in his mind, he fell asleep; but his sleep was

fitful. Sometimes the sad, sweet face of his gentle Annie would bend over him, awakening him with a start. A conviction settled more and more strongly upon his mind that he had cruelly wronged his brother, and he would be allowed no rest till he should atone.

Once, long before morning, he saw himself face to face with a raging buffalo bull. It was without eyes, and gazed at him through sightless sockets, and shook its formidable head at him with as much certainty of aim as though its thick and darkened skull were ablaze with light. The beast held the only vantage-ground, — an open plain, — and at his back rose a sheer and inaccessible mountain, up which there was no chance of escape.

XXIII

THE SQUAW ASSERTS HER RIGHTS

THE morning found the post-trader with a raging headache. For several minutes after awakening to consciousness he remained motionless, not realizing time or place.

“Oh, mother! my head, my head!” he exclaimed, as he locked his fingers above his throbbing temples. Never before since his marriage had he uttered a cry of pain without bringing Wahneta to his side. Now no one noticed his groaning. He raised himself upon his elbow and gazed through the open door of his sleeping apartment upon the broad and dusty plain. The sun was already an hour high. Numerous campers had struck their tents, and the teams were moving toward the farther West. He turned his gaze within the tent and regarded Wahneta with a look and feeling of disgust. She had prepared his breakfast while he slept, and had fed their

ravenous brood, — all save the baby in its Indian basket, which was whining pitifully as it blinked its eyes in a helpless attempt to drive away the flies.

"Why don't you keep your young one quiet?" roared her husband, savagely.

"I've been doing the best I could," said the woman, meekly. "I've gotten all the children settled outside in the shade, studying their lessons, except this poor little papoose, and I'll 'tend to his wants as soon as I have disposed of the worst baby in the lot, — and that's you."

"What in thunder has come over you, woman?"

"Nothing."

"Have you had breakfast?"

"Food would choke me, Joseph Addicks! See what you did last night!" She threw back her heavy mass of torn and tangled hair, exposing an ugly bruise on her temple. "If it were not for these children, I'd leave you and strike out for myself. But as I cannot get away from them, I will stay by them, as many a woman in all countries is obliged to do under like circumstances till she either dies or can run away. But I tell you right here and now that I will never take another blow from you or any other man."

"I'd like to see you help yourself."

"I'll help myself by laying you dead at my feet! No man who respects himself will marry a woman not his equal, or if she is of an inferior race. I did n't know this when I was a foolish young girl, but I understand it now. In marrying an Indian girl you did not elevate her one atom, but you degraded us both. I now tell you to your teeth that I hate you, and you can't help it."

"I never would have married you if I had known that I was not an outlaw. I thought myself a murderer till yesterday. I know better now. I am sorry I beat you, though. I would n't have done it if I had n't been in a drunken frenzy. I'm in a better temper this morning; but oh, my head, my head!"



"Let it ache! So does mine, but I can't lie abed and groan. I am compelled to look after the family's needs, sick or well."

Then, womanlike, though the poor little papoose fretted pitifully in its Indian basket, his wife brought cold water and towels and bathed his throbbing forehead.

"I'm better now," he said, as his temples cooled. "Will you forgive me for beating you last night, Wahnetta?"

She looked at him in astonishment. Never before, though he had often bestowed indignities upon her that he would not have inflicted upon a favorite dog or horse, had he addressed her thus, or shown any sign of repentance.

"If I had kept my promise, Wahnetta, as I should have done, I would have taken you as a bride to London or Montreal and replaced you in the world of civilization, in which you were educated by your fond, mistaken father. But I could n't do it, because of my daily dread of the hangman's rope. I do not wonder that you despise me. I did not realize that I had become that thing that every self-respecting man of the West abhors,—a 'squawman'!"

"Don't you dare to say 'squaw' to me, Joseph Addicks! It is an epithet no white man uses except in contempt. When we were married I was your equal in education, your superior in personal appearance, and your match in ambition. I now see that I was far ahead of you in moral character, for I was never a fugitive from what the world calls justice. But why did n't you confide all this to me long ago?"

He laughed derisively. "I knew the treacherous Indian nature too well, woman; and I would n't trust you now if it were in your power to betray me; but there is nothing now to betray."

"And I am no longer afraid of you, Joseph Addicks."

"My name is not Addicks. My brother passed through

here yesterday. His name is John Ranger, and I am his long-lost brother, Joseph. He is taking his family to the Territory of Oregon."

He arose finally and made a tolerable breakfast, she, for the first time since their marriage, taking her seat at the table beside him as he ate.

"If you'd keep yourself clean and tidy, like a self-respecting white woman, you would n't appear so — so Injuny, and I would n't be so very much ashamed of you. I'm sick to death of this bondage, Wahnetta. I, too, was a young and unsophisticated fool when we were married. What will you take to let me out of it honorably? I want to do everything I can to atone; but something must be done. I will not longer endure this mode of existence."

"I have an idea, Joseph. My inheritance from my father arrived several days ago. I had n't thought of claiming it for myself, but I will now. Give me a letter of credit for the whole of it, with an outfit for travelling, and I will go, with the children, to a village on the Willamette River called Portland, in the Territory of Oregon. You know Dr. McLoughlin well, and so do I. There's a convent in Portland, where I can place the girls, and a brothers' school near by for the boys. I'll get a boarding-place, not too far away, for myself and the little tots that are too young to be in school. I will soon recruit if I can get a chance to rest up and dress myself as the white women in my position do. You won't know me in three months after I have had a chance to live in keeping with my station."

She paused, panting because of her own audacity. Never before had she ventured to give utterance to so long a speech in his presence. He saw a ray of hope and pursued it eagerly.

"I have a good wagon, and a fine four-mule team that is idle," he said musingly. "I guess we can manage to make the change."

"What will you do, Joseph? Can you stay here when we are gone?"

"I should n't think you'd care to consider me after all that's happened, Wahnetta."

"You cannot give me back my heart, my husband. I can never be happy without you. But, savagely as I spoke a while ago, my heart is full of love for you, and the thought of leaving you alone in this God-forsaken wilderness brings back all the tenderness of the past."

"I can take care of myself, I reckon."

"Of course; if I can take care of myself and seven children, you ought to be able to get along alone, or hire somebody to help you," she exclaimed, straightening her shoulders, and revealing long-lost or hidden traces of her girlhood's beauty in the light of an awakening hope. "I know the tendency of my race, or any other, to hark back to primitive conditions under adverse circumstances. The time has now come when the children must have the social and educational advantages of a higher civilization, or they'll be Indians to the end of the chapter. As you will not permit me to take them to the East, I am glad that I can take them to the farthest West."

"How soon can you be ready to start?"

"To-morrow, or as soon as the team is ready. We'll pose as Indians till we get to Oregon. We can camp in the Portland woods till an outfit of clothing can be prepared in which you would n't be ashamed to see your wife and children appear before kings."

The next morning early, while the Ranger team was yet in camp, and its Captain was not yet awake, an Indian woman, with an unkempt swarm of dusky children, passed him on their westward way, unrecognized.

"Daddie's in a raging fever!" cried Jean, arousing the Little Doctor.

"We'll fetch him out all right," said the doctor, as the frightened children shivered around the fire in the crisp

morning air, silent and awe-stricken. "I saw an Indian 'sweat-house' near the river-bank after we had encamped last night. We'll fumigate it, and give your father a thorough steaming, children. Don't be frightened. He's caught the mountain fever. Luckily, I have on hand a lot of crude brimstone. I gathered it near Hell Gate."

"But we must n't use the sweat-house without the consent of the Indians," said Scotty. "Yonder comes a lot of them on horseback now. I'll see them and make terms."

The terms having been arranged satisfactorily, the Little Doctor proceeded to make preparations for the reception of her patient.

When the inner surface of the dugout had reached a white heat, the fire was permitted to die, and the place was cleansed of coals and ashes. It was then tested by a thermometer; and when cooled to the proper temperature, the Captain, now almost incoherent from fever, was wrapped in blankets and placed, feet foremost, within its depths, where he lay with his head enveloped with cold, wet towels, leaving only a small aperture at the mouth of the "infernal pit," as he called it, for air. Thus situated, and perspiring at every pore, he fell asleep.

A delicious, restful languor followed his awakening, and he was aroused, against his protest, to be removed by willing attendants to a closed tent, where he was packed in cold, wet sheets, and left to rest for another hour or more.

"His heart has good action, and he'll come out all right; but we can't break camp to-day," said the Little Doctor.

By evening the Captain found his fever conquered. But he was not strong enough to ride back to his brother's trading-post for the amicable interview he had planned; so, like most of our "ships that pass in the night," his opportunity was gone; and as time wore on, his good resolutions vanished also.

The long-drawn monotony of the journey caused the entries in her journal to become exceedingly monotonous to Jean, who often neglected a duty she would have highly prized had she been able to foresee the value of the record she was making under constant protest.

On the tenth of July she wrote as follows: "We are now in Utah Territory, which is the first organized part of Uncle Sam's dominions we have set foot upon since leaving the Missouri River. Our hunters to-day killed an antelope and a brace of 'fool' hens, or sage-chickens, which our half-famished crowd cooked and ate with relish.

"What a way we human animals have of preying upon the brute creation, as we falsely name the mild-eyed entities which we must slay and eat that we may live! I have no heart to write. I can only think of the beautiful eyes of that antelope we have killed and eaten, and of the sage-hens that were not enough afraid of a boot that Yank threw at them to get out of his way. And we called them 'fools' because they trusted us, who, as compared to them, are knaves."

After crossing the Rocky Mountains through a huge and devious gap¹ by ascents and descents so gradual that nothing but the changing trend of the water-currents marked the point or points of demarcation, the train reached a height overlooking the valley of the Great Salt Lake, — the "Promised Land" of the Latter-Day Saints, who even in that early day had made it, in many spots, to blossom as the rose.

The almost intolerable heat of midday was followed at night by cold and marrow-piercing winds, making both day and night uncomfortable.

"No wonder the immigrants are ill, Mr. Burns," said Mrs. McAlpin, one evening, when, as she could not politely avoid him, she sought to control the conversation. "Nothing saves any of us but the snow-laden air from these grand old mountains. I have stood on the

¹ Since called the Ogden Gateway.

Himalayas, where the Mahatmas are said to hold sway, I have beheld the shimmering beauty of Egyptian skies, I have floated among the silent wonders of the Dead Sea; but the majestic beauty of these Rocky Mountains transcends them all."

"I've just left a family of Mormons, where there is a bishop ill with the fever. The faithful were trying to cure him by the ridiculous custom of laying on of hands," said Burns, who had sought her company, hoping to "talk it out."

"Not necessarily ridiculous," answered the lady. "If a faithful Catholic crowd can change a little vial of mummy-dry blood into liquid form in answer to faith and prayer, why can't an equally faithful Mormon crowd heal the sick through the same power of concentration, which is only another name for faith?" and the Little Doctor hurried away.

XXIV

A MORMON WOMAN

NEWLY created Mormon settlements came occasionally into view, the long, low, ashy-white adobe houses of the Latter-Day Saints proclaiming, by the front doors to be counted in their dwellings, the number of wives each patriarch possessed.

One cold, blustering evening a lone woman, middle-aged, swarthy, sinewy, and tall, came into the camp afoot. A bundle of bedding strapped to her back gave her an uncanny appearance as she shrank into the shadows. A reticule of generous dimensions depended from her neck in front and reached below her waist-line, containing her little stock of clothing and provisions.

"I am making my way to the Northern Oregon coun-

try," she said, meaning the great expanse of territory which at that time embraced the present States of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, with a large slice of the present State of Montana included. "President Young saw I was going crazy," she added, throwing aside her reticence after being warmed and fed. "I was n't the least mite dangerous to have around, as I was n't violent; but I cried and took on so, after I had to give my husband away in marriage to another woman, that I scared the hull church into a fear that I'd upset polygamy. So President Young said I might have a permit to leave the country."

"Do you mind telling us all about it?" asked Sally O'Dowd.

"It can all be summed up in one word, — polygamy," she exclaimed, glancing furtively around. "Are there any Mormons about?"

"No, madam," said the Captain. "The boss of this combination is a pagan, and he would n't hurt a Christian. You have no cause to be afraid. But you'd better not tell us any secrets. The proper way to keep a secret is to keep it to one's self, unless you want to keep it going."

"I am a Mormon, good and true," she began again, rising to her feet and spreading her thin hands to the blaze; "but when my husband went into polygamy, which it was his Christian duty to do, according to the Scripture (and I'm not blaming him), the Devil got the upper hand of me, and I could n't stand it. You see, they made me go to the Endowment House and give my own husband away in marriage to another woman; and that, too, after we had stood together at the altar, in the little church in my father's parish, ever so long before, and swore before God and a score of witnesses that we would forsake all others and keep ourselves only to each other as long as we both should live. Polygamy may be all right for people who have n't made such vows; but I know it was not right for us. What do you think, Mr. Captain?"

"I think that women have had their hearts cultivated at the expense of their heads quite long enough," was his emphatic response.

"I thought the Mormons did n't compel any woman to give her husband away in marriage against her will," said Jean.

The woman uttered a sharp, rasping, staccato laugh that betokened incipient insanity.

"There are other ways to kill a dog besides choking him to death on butter!" she cried, throwing her arms wildly about, and casting grotesque shadows upon those sitting behind her. "They told me that as a good Mormon I was bound to obey the mandates of the Church; that my eternal salvation, and my husband's also, depended upon obedience. And they said it so often, and prayed over me so long and hard, that at last I said I'd do it. Then they held me to my promise. But my heart would beat, and the world would move; so in spite of what I did in the Endowment House, I would go about and tell my woes to everybody that would listen. And I was getting to be a scandal in Zion, so that by-and-by, when a lot of Gentiles got to making a fuss about it, — they made it hot for polygamy through my story, — the elders took it up. But they could n't tie my tongue, for the Devil had hold of it, and he just kept it wagging. The cases of Abraham and Jacob and David did n't fit my case at all, for they had n't made any such vows."

The woman, as if suddenly recollecting herself, stopped speaking, and glared at her awe-stricken listeners with an insane gleam in her fiery eyes.

"Oh, my head, my head!" she cried, clasping her hands tightly over her temples. "The Devil has caught me again!"

"You'd better not talk any more to-night," said the Little Doctor, soothingly. "And you cannot go on till morning. I'll make a warm, snug bed for you in one of

the wagons. After you've had a sound sleep and a good breakfast, you can go on your way refreshed."

"But I've got to talk it out. You're like all the rest! You want me to be quiet, when the rocks and stones would cry out against me if I did!"

"You'll take a drink of our 'Number Six,' won't you?" asked the Little Doctor. "Here it is. I've mixed and sweetened it for you."

She grasped the decoction and gulped it eagerly.

"Thanks," she said, returning the cup. "I must be going now. I've stayed too long already. The Danites will be after me. Do you think any of them are in hearing now? President Young put me under their surveillance before they'd let me start. He put his hands on my head and blessed me, too. Talk about your popes! Why, Brigham Young can discount a ten-acre field full of Apostolic successors, and be the father of a whole regiment of American progeny in the bargain. I know you think I'm crazy, but there's plenty of method in my madness. I'm not half as crazy as I act and talk."

"Will the Danites protect you till you reach the end of your journey?" asked Jean. "Are you sure?"

"Not if they catch me among Gentiles. President Young took precautions to prevent me from talking to outsiders, he thought. I mustn't be seen here. But I must tell you before I go that his blessing came direct from God. It filled my very marrow-bones with light. It was like phosphorus in the dark, or diamonds in the sunlight. I felt like a bird! No man can do these things that President Young is doing unless God be with him."

"Do you believe that Brigham Young is really inspired of God?" asked Mary, incredulously.

"It is by their fruits that we know them, miss. Zion has been greatly blessed under the ministrations and guidance of President Young."

"Then why do you wish to escape from his kingdom?" asked Marjorie.

"Because I was not good enough to endure polygamy; I was too great a sinner. I could n't obey the gospel and keep my senses."

"Did the thought never strike you that the fault might be in the gospel, instead of your heart or head?" asked Hal.

"The High and Holy One of Israel cannot err," she replied, shaking her head, and again waving her long arms to and fro in the smoky air. "There are disbelievers in this camp, and I cannot tarry. May Heaven guide and protect you all, and bring you into the holy faith of the Latter-Day Saints! O blessed Lord, direct these souls into Thy kingdom before it is everlastingly too late!"

She waved her arms over their heads once more, and turning suddenly, vanished like a deer into the darkness.

"That poor misguided creature has the spirit of a martyr," said Captain Ranger, after a painful silence.

"It is a good deal easier for some folks to preach than to practise," exclaimed Sally O'Dowd.

"There are kernels of truth in all 'ologies," said Scotty.

"As a man thinketh, so is he," exclaimed Mary.

"She is striving to save her immortal soul. All religions have their origin in human selfishness," remarked the Captain, dryly.

"Better say they originate in human needs," replied Jean; "but selfishness is universal, all the same."

"Yes. Selfishness is a necessary attribute of human existence," said the Little Doctor, punching the dying fire into a blaze. "Don't you think so, Mr. Burns?"

"I quite agree with you, madam. Selfishness belongs to human environment, and is as much a part of us as hunger, thirst, love, or ambition. Nothing is made in vain."

"Not even sin?" asked Mary.

"Not even sin!" echoed Jean. "This would have been a very useless world if there had been no wrongs to set right in it, and no suffering to relieve. Nobody could

appreciate heat if it were not for cold, or light if there were no darkness. Hunger compels us to search for food; thirst seeks satisfaction in drink, and ambition in the search for personal advancement. It often unconsciously assists the weak by its efforts, when it intends to help nothing but the personal selfishness that inspires it. Everything, both good and evil, is a part of the eternal programme."

"Where did you imbibe such ideas as you often express on this subject?" asked her father, a great pride in her springing afresh in his heart.

"From the stars, I guess, or from the angels. Or maybe they were born within me. I never could reconcile myself to the generally accepted idea of gratitude. To thank God for blessings we enjoy that are not accessible to others, to me is nothing else but blasphemy."

"Then you cannot say with the poet, —

" 'Some hae meat, and canna eat,
And some would eat that want it;
But we hae meat, and we can eat,
Sae let the Lord be thankit! ' "

said Mrs. Benson, who had been looking on in silence.

"Indeed I can't!" exclaimed Jean. "But we've all heard just such prayers and praises through all our lives."

"Nobody in normal health has any right to be thankful for anything unless he earns it," said the Captain; "and then he has nobody to thank but himself."

"He ought to be thankful for health, at least," suggested Marjorie.

"If you'd follow your logic to its natural sequence, Captain, my occupation would be gone," laughed the Little Doctor. "It is as unnatural and unscientific to be sick as to be hungry; therefore there should be no doctors."

"I can see no analogy between your conclusions and my observations," said the Captain.

"I can," cried Jean.

"Every error under the sun is mixed with good, or it couldn't exist at all," said Scotty. "But the truth remains that the Universe with all that it contains exemplifies the Divine Idea. God IS.

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose *mother* Nature is, and God the soul."

"You see, I've altered the thought a little, Mrs. McAlpin; but I look to the shade of Pope for pardon. If he were with us to-day, he would doubtless accept my amendment. We can't know much about the mystery we call God. It makes little difference to the humanity of the various nations of the earth, all of whom must worship the Divine Idea, whether it be called Vishnu, Chrishna, Isis, Allah, Jehovah —"

"These learned disquisitions over things unknown make me very weary," yawned Jean.

"And border on blasphemy," added Mary.

"We had better go to bed," exclaimed the Captain, rising. "These questions have taken a wide range, and we've all followed that poor Mormon devotee beyond her depth and our own."

"But such discussions relieve the monotony of travel and sometimes lead to independent thought," said Lengthy, who had sat squat upon his heels and haunches, a silent listener.

"God be with our Mormon sister," said Scotty, rising and adjusting his crutches. "Let us hope for her a safe journey to some friendly spot where polygamy ceases from troubling, and the saints are at rest!"

"That's from the Bible," cried Hal.

"Nobody can conceive of a better method of expressing an idea than that modelled after the language of the Bible," was the ready retort. "If I were as pronounced an agnostic as our Captain pretends to be, which I am not, I'd read my Bible daily, if for no other reason than to

improve my vocabulary. Read it, Hal; study its precepts; imitate its language; revere its antiquity; emulate the example of its good men; shun the sins of its Davids and Solomons; fill your mind with the wisdom of its Isaiahs and Deborahs; and, above all, obey its Ten Commandments and follow the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule."

"I'll see spooks to-night!" cried Jean.

As these chronicles will have no further dealings with the Mormon refugee, it is well to add, in closing the incident, that twenty years after the episode had passed and was almost forgotten, some of the members of the long disbanded Ranger train, who were passing through eastern Oregon, on their way to the mines of northern Idaho, found her keeping a "Travellers' Rest" in the bunch-grass country, where, as cook, chambermaid, waiter, and general scullion, she was supporting her repentant consort, who dutifully received the cash given by her guests in exchange for such food for man and beast as her unique hostelry afforded.

XXV

JEAN LOSES HER WAY

A STANCH but frail-looking ferry-boat waited to carry the Ranger train across Green River. Jean, who, after her mother's death, had developed a strong propensity for daily hours of solitude, looked longingly at the desolate scenery while her father's train was awaiting its turn at the ferry, and, noting the great table-rock that still overlooks the river, climbed unaided to its top, where she became so deeply absorbed in contemplating the wild, weird character of the scenery

about her that she did not see that the afternoon was waning, until the sun was down.

"The Psalmist wondered at the mystery of the heavens, but I marvel at the mysteries of earth," she said. "Tell me, ye rugged rocks, and you, ye waters of the desert, the secret of existence, if you can. Am I alone with Thee, O God? Or are these rough-ribbed rocks, like me, instinct with life?"

"You'd better hurry, young lady, or you'll miss the last trip of the ferry-boat for the night," cried a voice that seemed to come from beneath her feet. Thoroughly frightened, she hastened to retrace her steps. How she regained the river-bank she could never recollect; but when she stood panting at the water's edge, and beheld through the gloaming the last of her father's wagons ascending the opposite steep, it was past the twilight hour, and one by one the stars came out amid the circling blue of the bending sky. The roar of the waters was deafening.

"Can I do anything for you, miss?"

It was the same voice that had reached her from beneath the rock. She looked up and beheld a tall, sunburned young man, bowing and lifting a broad sombrero, who seemed as much embarrassed over the novel situation as herself.

"I am glad to see the face of a white man, sir. I was frightened half out of my senses till I saw you."

"And are you not frightened now?"

"Yes, a little bit. There are too many Indians stalking about to allow me to feel exactly comfortable. But I shall rely upon you for protection, sir."

"I suppose other trains will be along presently. They will encamp on this side of the river for the night, so you will have company."

"We are away ahead of the other trains, sir. We took a cut-off in the mountains."

"But you are afraid of the Indians?"

"No, sir; not now, because —" She stopped as she looked into his kindly face and caught the amused gleam of a pair of piercing eyes.

"Because — why?"

"Because you talk and act like a gentleman, sir. I am not afraid of a gentleman." She paused again, surprised at her own composure. Her eyes fell, and a deep flush overspread her features, as the thought flashed through her mind that she was utterly in the power of this stranger.

"Can you ferry me across the river to-night, sir? My daddie will pay you well for your trouble."

"I could not attempt it. We never risk running the ferry after sundown. Guess we can make you comfortable on this side till morning."

"But there is no house where I can stop, and I have n't any money. But that's nothing new for girls. They never have money."

"Oh, yes, they do, often. In the old country, where I came from, girls often inherit money; and some of them own very large estates."

"But only by courtesy, sir."

He smiled at her frank simplicity. "You are sure of a safe night's lodging and a speedy return to the custody of the man you call daddie. What ever possessed you to bestow upon him such a name?"

"It was merely a notion, and is peculiar to myself in our family. But, sir, what ever shall I do? Daddie will be frightened out of his wits; and so will Mame and Marjorie and Hal!" and Jean began to weep convulsively.

"There, there, don't cry! There is nothing to be afraid of. I have a home in the bank yonder. It is n't a palace, — only a cave, or dugout, in the side of the rock, — but it is clean and dry and warm: You'll be as securely protected there as in your father's camp. I could do no better, under the circumstances, for my mother or my Queen."

"Are you English, sir?"

"I am proud to answer, Yes."

"You don't look like the subject of a woman ruler."

"Why not?"

"Because you seem like a sovereign in your own right."

"So I am, in America."

"I mean to be a sovereign American, myself, some day."

He laughed and shook his head.

"I hope you are never going to become one of those discontented women whom I've heard of in America, who are engaged in a perpetual quarrel with their Creator because they were not born men."

"Have you seen such women in America, sir?"

"No; but I have read some newspapers that made the charge."

"Do you believe everything that you read in the papers? Daddie don't."

"I can't say that I do."

"God understands what He is about when He creates a girl, sir; and God did n't create us to be the vassals of anybody. All we ask is a chance to do our best in everything, ourselves being the judges as to what that best shall be."

"How old are you?"

"Almost sixteen."

"You act with the charm of a child, but you talk like a grown-up woman. Are all the girls of your family equally clever?"

"God never made two trees, or even two leaves of a tree, exactly alike. You could n't expect two persons to be alike."

The stranger, conscious of a peculiar interest in this new and original character, felt a tumultuous sensation in the region of his heart.

"I am hungry, sir. But as I have n't any money, I must ask you to trust me till to-morrow."

He was leading her toward his dugout as they talked,

or rather as he listened. He had a school-day remembrance of a pair of brown eyes like Jean's. He had worshipped those eyes from a distance, for their possessor was a nobleman's daughter with whom he had never exchanged sentiments, and she had never bestowed a thought upon him. And here was this artless, untaught, but wonderfully intelligent maiden, in a travel-soiled blue calico dress, and sunbonnet to match, who seemed to him possessed of potentialities so far in advance of any promise ever given by the object of his earlier dreams that he spurned the thought of comparing the two as he dwelt upon her words. His heart continued its wild tattoo, and he felt as if walking on air.

"Here! This way, Siwash," he called to his Indian servant, as he paused in front of his lodgings and tendered her a seat outside. "As you see, I have company. Get up the very best meal the place affords. This guest and I are to dine together."

The Indian grunted assent; and the simple meal of pemmican, black coffee, army biscuit, and baked beans fresh from the covering of hot ashes in which they had been smothered till done to a turn, which formed the ferryman's usual bill of fare, was supplemented by a dessert of tea-cakes and preserved ginger, the whole arranged on a small table covered with a white oilcloth and furnished with tin dishes and steel cutlery.

"I trust you will excuse the accompaniments of a higher civilization, little miss. You will find the fare plain but palatable."

"It is fine," cried Jean, as she ate with the zest that a life in the open air alone can give. "Nobody need ask for better."

"Will you favor me with your past history?" asked her host, after the repast was finished.

"There is n't much to tell, sir. My daddie got the farthest West fever a good while ago; but he never sold out his farm and sawmill till last March. Then he

got ready, and we started across the continent. God saw that the journey was too hard for my dear mother, so He took her to heaven from the Black Hills. And now, sir, will you tell me about yourself? Were you born in London?"

"Why do you think I was born in London?"

"Because you remind me of my great-grandmother. She was born in London. We call her Grannie."

The Indian servant had heaped some fagots of sage-wood upon the hearth, filling the little room with a pungent and not unpleasant odor, and diffusing a delightful warmth and glow through the air, to which the light of a pair of candles gave an eerie charm.

"To be plain with you, I grew weary of life at college, so I ran away and went to sea. I was a headstrong boy, and gave my mother a whole lot of trouble."

He ceased speaking and bowed his head upon his hands, his elbows upon the table. Jean saw that his fingers were long and shapely, his head was large and well-balanced, and his abundant hair was brown and bright and slightly curled.

"Were you never sorry, sir?"

"Having put my hand to the plough, or rather helm, I could n't afford to turn back — or at least I thought I could n't — till I had made my fortune."

"Did you make your fortune, sir?"

"Not till —" He checked the word that was in his heart. "I first went to Montreal, where I fell in with a company of Hudson Bay traders, with whom I went to the Great Northern Lakes. I soon made, and lost, several fortunes. I have always intended to return to my mother, but the years have come and gone; and now, at the age of twenty-four, you find me, as you see, with another fortune to make. But it seems an uphill struggle."

"Do you write regularly to your mother, sir?"

"I am sorry to be compelled to answer no; but I

promise you to do better hereafter. And now, as the evening wanes, and I must leave you to the privileges of my castle for the night, will you tell me your name?"

"Certainly. It is Ranger, — Jean Robinson Ranger. And you are Mr. —?"

"Ashleigh; Ashton Ashleigh, of Ashton Place, London, England."

"May I write to your mother from my Oregon home, when I get there, and tell her all I know about you?"

"Is n't that an odd request, Miss Ranger?"

Jean blushed to the tips of her ears.

"Nobody ever called me Miss Ranger before," she said, to hide her confusion. "My sister Mary is the Miss Ranger of our family. Yes, I did make an unusual request; but I thought of your mother pining for news of her son, and fancied she might be glad to hear about him, even from a stranger. But I see that it would hardly be proper for me to write; so please do it yourself."

"Write to her by all means, Miss Ranger, as I assure you I surely will. And now," he added, rising, "I hear your Indian maid tapping outside, and it is time to say good-night. I trust you will sleep well and have pleasant dreams."

"Good-night, Mr. Ashleigh. I thank you ever so much for all your kindness."

XXVI

LE-LE, THE INDIAN GIRL

"**N**IKA klosch cloochman!" clucked the Indian girl.

Jean looked at her inquiringly.

"Nika wake cumtux Siwah wa-wa?" asked the dusky maiden, offering her hand.

"She says she is a good Indian girl, and asks if you understand her," said Siwash, who was leisurely putting the room to rights. "She's my little sister; heap good. Ugh! Nika speak jargon?"

"No, Siwash."

But the maiden's manner, though coy, was assuring, and Jean clasped her hand eagerly. She was a graceful, nimble, and pretty creature; and Jean thought with a sigh of regret of the ugly transformation awaiting her under the cares and burdens of maturity and maternity, when, no longer like "the wild gazelle, with its nimble feet," she would resemble other elderly Indian women.

"What is your name, little girl?" she asked, as the maiden dropped gracefully upon the hearth at her feet.

"Nika wake cumtux Boston wa-wa."

"She says she does n't understand you," grunted Siwash.

"Ah-to-ke-nika a-it sewar."

"She says she has a good heart."

"Why does n't she speak her name?"

The girl crouched low on the hearth and spread her shapely brown fingers before the dying embers.

"Nika Le-Le. Nika caid."

"She says her name is Le-Le, and she is a slave."

"Your sister? and a slave?"

"I, too, was a slave," said Siwash, "but I bought my

freedom; and when I get ten horses of my own, I will buy Le-Le's. Could you help us? Your father is good."

"A good heart is n't always accompanied by a full purse," thought Jean.

"Who imagines that he has a property interest in your sister?" she asked aloud.

"Our chief, Tyee of the Nootkas. He captured both of us in a war with our people, the Seattles, many, many moons ago."

"Ugh! Way-siyah! Whulge!" cried the girl, writhing like a captured eel.

"Mac-kam-mah-shish, copa-nika?"

"She asks if you cannot buy her."

"Nowitka! Mika! Closh potlatch hy-u chickamin?"

"God knows I wish I could buy her," said Jean.

No painter could have done justice to the varying expressions that alternately lighted and clouded the Madonna-like face of Le-Le, as she strained every nerve to comprehend the conversation. And when at last every vestige of her awakening hope had settled into a conviction of failure, she buried her face in her hands, and, bending forward, shook her black abundant hair over her face and body to the floor, and uttered a piercing wail, making Jean's blood curdle.

"Le-Le's cold!" cried the girl, crouching lower, till the embers singed the ends of her straying locks.

"Don't cry, Le-Le dear. You have come to spend the night with me," exclaimed Jean, seizing her gently by the arm.

"Nika wake cumtux," cried the girl.

"You have come to sleep," pointing to the bed in the corner.

"Nowitka! sleep! Nika cumtux."

"She understands," said Jean, rising and turning to Siwash. "Good-night."

Jean was too full of contending emotions for sleep. She lingered long upon the hearth. "I could stay here

always," she exclaimed in a low voice, but loud enough to awaken the wary maiden from her slumbers on the bed. But the mutual vocabulary of the twain did not admit of satisfactory conversation, and the Indian girl sank back into unconsciousness.

As she sat there thinking, a pair of kindly eyes seemed watching her every movement with a tender devotion that made her heart beat wildly. "I wish I'd never teased or laughed at Mame," she sighed, as the Reverend Thomas Rogers flitted past her inner vision. "What is Life but Love? And who and what is Love but God? And what is God but the wonderful Mystery that is both Life and Love?"

Le-Le was away in dreamland, on the enchanted shores of Whulge, — the Indian name for the magnificent body of water known to the civilized world as Puget Sound.

"This is holy ground," cried Jean, so softly to herself that none but Cupid heard. "These lowly walls will be a sacred memory to me through all the rest of my life. But life will mean worse than nothing to me without my one hero. Must I go away to-morrow? Oh, my God! can I ever live again, away from this lodge in the wilderness? Guard and guide my love, O Spirit of Life, and shield him with Thine everlasting arms!"

Then, recollecting that she had not prayed, as usual, for the dear ones in camp, she lovingly invoked divine protection for each and all, and was soon in a sound, refreshing sleep.

"Yes, daddie dear, I'm safe and sound," she cried, as she awoke to consciousness, to find that the sun was shining and her father's familiar voice was calling her name in vigorous tones at the door.

Jean hastily donned her clothing, which, simple as it was, excited the envy of Le-Le. "Mika klosk, cultus potlatch?" she said inquiringly, as she fondled a blue-and-white neck-ribbon, which was not over clean.

"Cultus potlatch?" she asked again.

Although Jean was not certain as to the maiden's meaning, she gave her the ribbon and tried to think her excusable.

"Did you want it? Was that what you meant?"

"Nowitka! Cultus potlatch! Hy-as klos!"

Jean tied the ribbon in a double bow-knot around the girl's tawny neck, and Le-Le, studying its effect in the little mirror on the wall, exclaimed with a low chuckle, "Hi-yu klos!"

"Oh, daddie darling," exclaimed Jean, opening the door and springing to his embrace, "did you think your historian was lost?"

"Yes; or worse!" replied her father, his anger displacing anxiety as soon as he saw that she was safe. "This is n't the first time you've lost yourself on this trip. If it happens again, I'll —"

"Don't chide or punish the young lady, please!" interposed her obliging host. "If you had seen how badly frightened and anxious she was last night when she found herself left alone among strangers, you'd forgive her without a word."

"That's so, daddie," sobbed Jean.

"I surrendered my country-seat to her, and sent for this little Indian maiden to keep her company."

There was a touch of humor in his tone, augmented by a kindly smile, which sent the hot blood into the truant's face and made her heart beat hard.

"Won't you thank the gentleman, daddie? I might have been murdered but for him."

"Of course I thank the gentleman; but that does n't lessen your offence. You deserve a good thrashing!"

"Which I'll never get, daddie dear!" Then turning to her host, she added, "Daddie never whips us, but he threatens us sometimes."

"I think I owe you a little explanation, Captain," said

the host. "I might have risked taking your daughter across the river in a rowboat last night if it had been safe to trust her on the other side after dark. There are Indians camped along the way; and, though they are peaceful enough when they are compelled to be, they are not trustworthy under all circumstances. But my servant, Siwash, has breakfast ready and waiting. I can't allow you to go on till you have broken your fast."

The host conducted his guests into the dugout to a table loaded with a bountiful supply of coffee, fish, venison, hot biscuit, beans, and wapatoes, — the last two dishes being deftly exhumed from the depths of a bed of ashes, where they had been cooked to perfection during the night.

"Your servant is an artist in his business," said the Captain, in praise of the food.

"Yes, Captain. I found him a slave, and, seeing he was superior to most of his class, I purchased him for what you would consider a trifle. Then, as time wore on, I encouraged him to buy his freedom from me. He is now trying to purchase his sister; but he finds it slow work, as her value increases as she gets older and better able to dig camas and tan buffalo hides."

"It is awful to enslave the Indians!" cried Jean. "The Government ought to stop it!"

"Slavery among the Indians is no worse than among the negroes," said her host, with an admiring smile.

"Women are not responsible for slavery, sir," said Jean.

"But women are very ardent defenders of slavery wherever it exists, my daughter," added her father, gravely.

"That's because they themselves are servants without wages, daddie. Mother used to say that the worst slave-drivers she ever saw down South were the overseers who were slaves themselves. Women are not angels, but they are doing the best they can without political power."

"I don't know but you are right, Miss Ranger. Women ought to have power. My sovereign is a woman, and we have no slavery in England."

"Thank you for giving me the best of the argument, Mr. Ashleigh. But I see that daddie is impatient, and we must be going."

"I hope you'll pardon me for referring to a proposition you made last evening, although you may have changed your mind, Miss Ranger. You proposed writing to my mother. Will you do it?"

"Ask daddie."

"I have no objection, of course," said her father, "if it is understood that I shall see the letters."

"Of course," responded Jean.

"May I have the pleasure of corresponding with your daughter, sir?"

"Yes, if I can see the correspondence."

This was a greater concession than Jean had dared to hope for.

"Thank you, Captain Ranger. I am sure my mother will be delighted with the young lady's letters. She has awakened my dormant sense of filial duty and inspired me with a determination to return to it. I shall not neglect my mother again."

"Come, Jean! It is high time we were off!"

As her father spoke, the possible termination to this peculiar meeting gave him a heartache.

The last good-byes were spoken, and Captain Ranger heaved a sigh of relief. "It will be out of sight, out of mind, with both of 'em in less than a month!" he said, *sotto voce*.

XXVII

JEAN TRANSFORMED

“**W**HERE did you spend the night, Jean?” asked Mary.

“In heaven,” answered Jean, her cheeks glowing.

“Nonsense.”

“I mean exactly what I say, Mame. I lodged with an Indian princess, and ate my meals with a member of the British aristocracy. The princess could n’t speak English, but her brother acted as interpreter, so we got on all right. She is a slave of an old chief of the Seattles. I wish I had the money; I’d buy her, and send her back to her people.”

“You might as well wish you owned the moon!”

“I own the earth, — as much of it as I need. Everybody does.”

“Then the most of us get cheated out of our patrimony,” laughed Sally O’Dowd.

“I wish you could all have had a chance to look in on me and my princess last night; we were as snug as two bugs in a rug. The crickets sang on the hearth, just as they used to do of nights in the old home. The wind roared like a storm at sea, and the rush of the river was grand. I can shut my eyes and live it all over again.”

“You’ve gone stark mad!” laughed Hal.

“As mad as a March hare,” said Sally O’Dowd. “I know the symptoms from sad experience.”

“You ought to be repenting in sackcloth and ashes. Why are you not sorry?” asked Mary.

“Because in losing myself I found my fate.”

“Was it an Indian brave in a breech-cloth, with a bow

and arrow, a shirt-collar, and a pair of spurs?" asked Hal.

The roar of laughter that greeted this query made Jean fairly frantic. "You're worse than a lot of savages yourselves," she cried. "If I had my way, I'd go back to that lodge in the wilderness and stay there!"

Jean climbed into the wagon, buried her face in her hands, and abandoned herself to a deep, absorbing reverie. "Oh, mother dear," she said softly, "if you could speak, you would sympathize with me, I am sure. If I only had your love and sympathy, I would n't care what anybody else might think or say, — not even daddie. A new light and a new life have come into my soul. Though a cruel fate may separate us through this life, we shall always be one. But God made us for each other, and we shall surely meet again."

There was no longer any game to be had for the shooting; the little extra food the company could purchase from the Indians, or from the few white borderers at infrequent trading-posts, was held at almost prohibitive prices. Dead cattle continued to abound at the roadside, filling the air with an intolerable stench through every hour of the day and night. No camping-spot could be found where the surroundings were not thus polluted. Captain Ranger's teams were giving out from sheer exhaustion, induced by starvation rather than overwork, and two or more of his weaker oxen were dying daily.

"I'll break the horrible monotony of this diary," said Jean at last, "or I'll die trying." And for many days her jottings were confined to minute, and sometimes glowing, descriptions of snow-capped mountains, bald hills, tree-studded lesser heights, and vast and desolate wastes of sand and sage and rocks. Sterile valleys, verdant banks of little rivers, mighty streams, and running brooks received attention, in their turn, from her pen, the whole

making a record surprisingly akin to the journals kept by Lewis and Clark, and left on record half a century earlier, of the existence of which she had no knowledge. There was one theme of which her father enforced daily mention, — a regular account of the scarcity of grass and game and wood and water.

A murder by the roadside, and the consequent trial, conviction, and execution of the murderer by a "provisional government" temporarily organized for the purpose received a painstaking record, as did also a difficulty with some thieving and beggarly Indians, whose hostility was awakened by the rashness of one of a trio of bachelors, who were encamped one night near the Ranger wagons. Captain Ranger made the Indians a pacifying speech, but only by the aid of some trifling present among the women of the tribe, and a gift of a pair of blankets to their chieftain, was the impending danger averted. A double guard was placed outside that night; and, for several nights following, a corral was made of the wagons in the shape of a hollow square, into which the cattle were driven to rest and sleep.

The now famous Soda Springs, known to the commercial world as Idanha, next caught the coloring of Jean's pen. The different geysers rising from the tops of the gutter-sided mounds of soda-stone were carefully and graphically described. The crater of a long-extinct volcano received special mention. The bad water of alkali-infected streams and swamps, left by slowly evaporating pools and ponds, through which cattle and wagons labored with the greatest difficulty; the dreary wastes of sagebrush, sand, and rock, through which everybody who was able to walk at all was compelled to trudge on foot; the devastations of prairie fires; the endless wastes of stunted sage and greasewood; the struggling aspens on the margins of tiny streams, — all met graphic and detailed delineation, such as nobody can appreciate to the

full who to-day traverses these vast and wondrous wilds in a railway coach, or gazes upon them from a Pullman car.

"Captain Ranger," said Sally O'Dowd one evening, "do you notice that Jean is growing strikingly beautiful?"

They were halting for the night after a day's hard drive; and the jaded oxen, weak and sick from the combined effects of hard labor, cruel whippings, and an insufficient supply of grass and water, were necessarily the chief objects of his attention and solicitude. A broken wagon-tongue added to his perplexities, as good timber for repairs was not available; and the mileage of the day's travel had been much shortened by the necessity of stopping to mend the break, or, as the Little Doctor not inaptly said, "to reduce the compound fracture of a most important part of the wagon's anatomy."

"All my girls are handsome," said the Captain, as he tested the strength of a splice on the broken tongue by jumping upon it with both feet.

"But Jean has been transformed, Captain. The change has been growing upon her daily since the date of that Green River episode. The child is hopelessly infatuated with that young Englishman."

"Much good it'll do her," he exclaimed, mopping his brow with a soiled bandanna. "It is painfully evident that three of my girls will soon be women. If their mother were here, it would n't be so hard to manage them. No, Sally, I've noticed no particular change in Jean."

"Because you are too busy for observation, sir. She has n't been a particle like herself of late."

The Captain hurried away to his work, muttering, "Nonsense!"

Jean had seated herself on the most distant wagon-tongue, her battered, ink-bespattered journal in her lap, her pen in one hand, her inkstand in the other, her

knitted brows and glowing face expressing deep concentration of thought and feeling.

Captain Ranger, having finished his work of repairs, dropped wearily upon an axle-tree, and, for the first time in several days, prompted doubtless by the words of Sally O'Dowd, took a long and searching look at Jean.

"Yes, indeed; Sally is right," he soliloquized. "Jean is developing a wonderfully beautiful style of womanhood. What a pity it is that she cannot have her mother at the very time when she needs her most!"

Pangs of anxiety akin to jealousy shot through his heart as he studied her features; her downcast eyes were hidden by the heavy lashes as she bent over her work. "She does n't resemble her mother as Mary does, but she must be the almost exact counterpart of what my mother was at her age," he mused, as he noted for the first time the ripening lips, the rosy and yet transparent hue of her cheeks, and the sunny sheen of her hair. He was surprised that he had not before observed the soft, exquisite contour of her face and neck, the full rounded bust, and the shapely development of her feet and hands.

As he sat watching the lights and shadows of thought and feeling that played upon her features, the remembrance of the girlhood of her mother, whose arduous married years had all been spent in his service, arose before him with startling power. "Dear, patient, tender, self-sacrificing Annie!" he exclaimed, as he arose from his rocking seat and strode away in the gloaming. "I never half appreciated your worth until I lost you for ever!"

"No, not for ever," softly sung a still, small voice in the depths of his inner consciousness. "Do not reproach yourself. All eternity is yet to be."

Jean felt, rather than saw, the pressure of his eyes, and half divined his thoughts. She felt the telltale blood as it rushed unbidden to her cheeks, and was seized with a great longing to throw herself into his arms and breathe

out the full secret of her great awakening in his ears; but something in his manner repelled her advances, and she withdrew more than ever into herself.

"O Love!" she cried in a tone so low and sweet that none but a messenger from the Unseen might hear, "how ungovernable art thou, and how incomprehensible! The worldly-wise may decry thee; the misanthropic may deride thee; the vulgar may make of thy existence an unholy jest; the selfish and ignorant may trample upon thee; human laws may crush thee; but thou remainest still a thing of life, to fill thy votaries with a holy joy and endow them with the very attributes of God. An imperishable entity art thou, O Love! Thou art interblended with every fibre of my being now, and I accept thee as a sweet fulfilment of my earthly destiny."

Of course Jean was young and fond and inexperienced and foolish; and these chronicles would offer her rhapsodies as the utterances of no worldly-wise oracle. But her thoughts were fresh and pure; and who shall say they did not emanate from the very fountain of life itself, whose presence she could sense but could not understand?

She wandered off toward the rushing, maddening torrent of Snake River, whose music had for her, in these moods of introspection, but one interpretation.

"Daddie may denounce, Hal and Mame may tease, and Marjorie, — yes, and all the world deride me," she said, as she sat upon a bowlder and abandoned herself to reverie; "but henceforth there shall be nothing in this world for me to cherish but Love and its handmaiden, Duty."

Snake River, full at this point of jutting rocky islands, through which the foaming, roaring waters rushed like a thousand mill-races on parade, dashed madly against its banks beneath her feet, and rushing on again, roared and laughed and shrieked and sang. Lichens clung to the uplifted rocks, which, hoary with age and massive in proportions, held vigil in the midst of the eternal

grandeur. Mountains clambered over mountains in the dimly lighted distance, and reaching to the red horizon, overlooked the Pacific seas.

"The antelope and elk are gone," she thought, "and we are lone watchers amid the eternal vastness. But the sage-hen, the lizard, the owl, and the jaybird linger; and yonder, among the everlasting rocks, are the homes of the Indian, the rattlesnake, the badger, and the wolf."

Rustling footsteps startled her. "Why, it's daddie!" she exclaimed, her heart beating audibly. "I thought you were an Indian or a bear!"

"You ought n't to go off alone, my daughter. There is some hidden danger threatening us; I feel, but cannot divine it. Something is going wrong somewhere or somehow. Let's hurry back to camp."

"You're the last person on earth I'd suspect of giving way to a morbid fancy, daddie dear. You must be very tired."

"It is n't that, my daughter. I am sad because you have allowed your heart to stray, and I do need you so much — so much!"

She answered not a word.

XXVIII

THE STAMPEDE

THE next morning brought unexpected delays. The repairs about the camp and wagons consumed more time than had been anticipated, and it was ten o'clock before the cattle, which had been allowed to stray farther from camp than usual, in search of the dried and scanty herbage that alone staved off starvation, were driven into camp and hurried down to the river-bank to drink. The swiftness, foam, and sud-

den chill of the water, its depth and roaring, confused and frightened the half-sick and half-starved animals; and one, a patriarchal bull, the master and leader of the herd, who had often before made trouble, gave vent to a deep, sonorous bellow like the roar of an ancient aurochs. Then, with nose in air, he struck out across the stream, the herd following. A small, rocky cape crept out into the water on the opposite bank, affording the only visible landing-place; and up this the panic-stricken creatures scrambled in a mad stampede, which the helpless occupants of the camp surveyed with the calmness of despair.

"I had no idea that the poor creatures had enough life left in them to run a dozen rods on level ground," said Captain Ranger, after a grim silence. "Boys," he added in a husky voice, as he swallowed a great lump in his throat, "are any of you able to swim Snake River?"

"I can do it," answered John Brownson, an obliging young teamster, who had joined the company early in the journey and had made himself useful on many trying occasions.

"And I too," said John Jordan, another favorite of road and camp. The two intrepid volunteers shook hands with their anxious Captain and plunged boldly into the roaring, swirling, deafening torrent, through which Jordan swam with ease, his head now bobbing out of sight and now rising above the foaming current, to disappear again and again, till at last he was seen to emerge from the water on the opposite steep and ascend the almost sheer acclivity leading to the table-land above. It was a brave and daring feat, but it proved fruitless. The poor, panic-stricken cattle failed to recognize as a friend the stark white apparition, entirely bereft of clothing. It was all in vain that he called the leader of the herd by name; and when the frightened creature turned and charged him, and there was no shelter but some patriarchal sagebrush trees, he took refuge behind the

biggest of them till the aurochs changed his mind and turned to follow the stampeding herd.

The panic continued. The stampede was irresistible. The cattle were lost, and most of them were never heard of more, though it is said that Flossie, the companion and patient of Jean during the hours of her vigil on that never-to-be-forgotten night in the Black Hills, — Flossie, the faithful, enduring, and kindly-eyed milch cow whose calf had been killed on the road, — reappeared long afterwards in the sagebrush wilds of Baker County, Oregon, with quite a following of her children, grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren, all but herself as wild as so many deer. Flossie herself was recognized, they say, by the Ranger brand; and her hide, with the letters J. R. still visible behind the shoulder-blade, is to-day a valued relic of departed years in the mansion of a prominent actor in the drama of that eventful summer.

But what of Brownson? All day the hapless watchers of the camp had strained their eyes and ears for sight or sound of him, in vain.

“He must have been caught with cramps, or been dashed against the rocks by the current, for I saw him drown,” said Jordan, at sundown, as he rejoined the helpless watchers near the wagons.

Meanwhile, the men and women of the camp had not been idle. The lightest wagon-box the train afforded was selected and pressed into service for a ferry-boat; and while the men made oars, rowlocks, and rudder as best they could with the materials at hand, the women skilfully caulked the seams of the wagon-bed with an improvised substitute for oakum, under the supervision of the Little Doctor, making it tolerably water-tight. The wagon-box was then replaced on wheels and hauled upstream about half-a-dozen miles to a little valley where the river was wide, the banks low, and the water comparatively shoal and calm.

It was conjectured by Captain Ranger that the entire

force of men in the train might be able, by a concerted effort, to assist the watcher on the upland in his brave attempt to arrest the stampede and secure the cattle's return. But their united efforts were unavailing; and long before they returned, disheartened, apprehensive, and weary, the helpless watchers at the camp saw the bruised body of Captain Ranger's favorite mare rolling, tumbling, bumping, and thumping through the roaring waters and among the jagged rocks, near the very spot where Brownson had been drowned.

Noble, faithful, obedient Sukie! In her attempt to swim the river with her devoted master, who was seated in the stern of the novel boat leading her by the halter and encouraging her with kindly words, her strength failed utterly; and when she turned upon her side and Captain Ranger let go his hold upon the halter, she uttered a dying scream, rolled over, and was gone.

"If there is n't any horse heaven, the creative Force has been derelict in duty," sadly exclaimed the master, as he watched the lifeless body of his beloved and faithful servant floating down the stream.

Through the silent watches of the awful night that followed, John Ranger pondered, planned, and waited.

His three daughters and three younger children, Sally O'Dowd and her three babies, and Susannah and George Washington, all occupied the family wagon, around which he stalked through the silent hours as one in a dream.

"A formidable array of dependent ones," he said to himself over and over again. "And what is to become of my Annie's darlings? Was it for this that she started with me on this terrible journey?"

There was no audible answer to his anxious queries save the roaring of the river as it crashed its way between the rocks that formed its grim and tortuous channel.

Weary at last of walking, he crept into his tent beside Hal, who had been dead to the world from the

moment he touched his bed, so sweet is the deep forgetfulness of childhood when "tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep," is preparing it for the further endurance of an exacting and ambitious life. But Captain Ranger could not sleep. He arose and faced again the silent horrors of the situation.

The stars twinkled overhead in their usual triumph over disturbing forces; and, slowly fading into the coming twilight, rode the gibbous moon.

In his helplessness the lonely watcher lifted up his voice and prayed.

"I've never felt much worry over original sin, O Lord!" he cried, standing with hands uplifted in the chilly air, "but you know I've generally been honest. I've tried hard to do my duty according to my lights. I did n't mean to bring my Annie and her babies out here in the wilderness to die; but you understood the conditions, and because you understood, you took my wife away. I rebelled at first, but you helped me to bear it for her sake; and for this, for the first time, I thank you. And now, if you have the love for her children for which she always gave you credit, I am sure that you'll guide me safely out of this present trouble. And if you do, O Lord, I'll serve you as long as I live in whatever way you lead. Amen."

"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread!"

"Who spoke to me?" he asked, aloud. "Where did that voice come from? I could have sworn it was Annie! No; Annie is dead!"

In a flurry of excitement he peered in all directions, listening eagerly. But in his soul there slowly crept a quiet peace, and with it a sense of security and elation which he could not comprehend; neither could he doubt its reality.

Before him passed, in mental review, the strenuous

days of his boyhood, awakening youth, and early manhood. The memory of his mother arose before him, inexpressibly sweet and tender. He thought lovingly of his father, strong in the religious faith of which he had often made a jest. His gentle Annie seemed so near that he could almost reach her. But closer to him than any other seemed the presence of his brother Joseph. What a promising lad he was, and with what joy had the whole family striven to bestow upon him the educational advantages to which none of the others had dared to aspire!

Then passed before him, like scenes in a panorama, the awful pecuniary straits that followed, when the beloved brother fell under the ban of the law.

Then came in review his unexpected meeting with that brother in the wilderness. "Forgive my pride, brutality, and selfishness, O Lord! and by all that's holy, I'll make it right with Joel!"

And who shall say that this unique appeal to the great Source of Life was less acceptable to the Infinite than the studied petitions of gowned prelates? whose often conflicting appeals to Jehovah, if answered literally, would plunge the world into confusion and chaos under the diverse demands of the children of men.

His prayer ended, the chilled and worried wanderer returned to his bed and readdressed himself to sleep, this time with such success that when he awoke the sun was riding high in the heavens, and he heard the familiar voice of a train-master, whom he had left in his rear by taking the Green River cut-off, and who had now overtaken him.

"Hello, Captain!" exclaimed the new arrival, striking the wall of the sleeper's tent with the butt of his heavy ox-whip. "What's all this I've been hearing? Did n't you get back any of your stamped cattle?"

"Nary a hoof," replied the Captain. "I tell you we're in a mighty bad fix, Harlan."

"How are you going to get out?"

"Don't know yet. It's a ground-hog case, though, I'm bound to make it somehow. Got any cattle to sell?"

"Possibly. Might spare two yoke and an odd steer. Got any money?"

"A few dollars. But I don't want to get into Oregon dead broke. Can't you trust a fellow till we reach the settlements?"

"I could if we were n't running short o' grub. This journey has cost like the dickens from the start; and it won't get any cheaper on the home stretch. Every fellow you strike wants money. It was n't so in the States."

"We can swap accommodations if we like, Harlan. I have several bags of jerked buffalo meat." His voice faltered, as he remembered that this meat had been prepared by the order of his vanished wife. "We laid in a lot of flour and other stuff at our last Utah trading-post; so we're not short."

An old-fashioned game of barter and dicker was soon concluded; and Captain Ranger set his men to work, rearranging the wagons and making ready to move on.

XXIX

IN THE LAND OF DROUTH

ALL the wagons except the "saloon," or family vehicle, were ruthlessly stripped of their various appurtenances; the running gear of those that had seemed to stand the wear and travel with the least injury were selected to hold the absolute necessities of the remainder of the journey. Many articles of utility were compelled to find a lodgment in the family wagon, causing Sally O'Dowd to ruefully survey the limited space for the little flock who were too young in years to walk regularly.

"We'll see what can be done," said the Captain, thoughtfully. "I've left the saloon wagon to the last, hoping somebody would come along who could spare us a few more steers. We've thrown away everything we can do without. But we'll get the cattle."

"It's lucky we've got the money the teamsters paid us to get back after they deserted us," said Jean. The Captain's face brightened.

"Why, surely!" he cried. "I had forgotten all about the financial end of that incident. You have a business head on you, my girl!"

"Here it is," cried Marjorie. "It is in our great-grandmother's silver spectacle-case. Jean put it there."

"Sure enough," said her father. "Your great-grandfather carried that tarnished and battered spectacle-case all through the Revolutionary War. It is indeed a lucky find."

In less than an hour another train of dilapidated wagons came along, accompanied by half-a-dozen loose oxen and a discouraged cow.

Then for the first time the faces of Mrs. Benson and Mrs. McAlpin brightened. During all the hurry of the day they had wandered aimlessly about, steadfastly refusing to accept any assistance until the Ranger family should first be provided with oxen.

"Now, as we can get cattle enough to move one of our wagons, it is our time to make preparations for a start," said the Little Doctor.

"Did you think for a minute that you'd be abandoned to your fate?" asked Captain Ranger.

"We did n't allow ourselves to think at all; we just waited and trusted."

In less than an hour what was left of the Ranger outfit was in motion. And a sorry-looking outfit it was indeed.

One of Mrs. McAlpin's wagons was abandoned after she had discarded everything of appreciable weight that

could be spared. But there are exceptions to every rule, and the Little Doctor, watching her opportunity, managed with the aid of Scotty to stow away the long-secreted spinning-wheel and baby's cradle which had been Mrs. Ranger's property.

"If we can complete our journey at all, we can carry these things," the Little Doctor said to Jean. "We are getting near the Columbia River, as we can see by the topography of the country; and there's a mission at The Dalles, where we can get more help if we need it, I am sure. Mamma and I will ride our horses as long as they are able to carry us. We have provisions enough to feed our two teamsters and ourselves till we reach a settlement."

One woman at a time was detailed to ride in the family wagon and take care of the babies; all the rest walked, stopping to ride only when the frequent streams that were too deep to wade were to be crossed; at which times the wearied oxen were compelled to do the double duty of pulling the loads and carrying the footsore pedestrians on their backs.

The weather was now intensely hot during the long hours of sunshine. The sandy wastes radiated the blistering heat under which the vast sageplains lay staring at the unmerciful sun in apathetic stillness, like a Lilliputian forest under a state of arrested development. But the nights were chilly, and the storms of wind and dust that came up with the going down of the sun were trying in the extreme. The men of the party no longer had tents or wagon-covers for shelter, and were obliged to sleep on the lee side of friendly rocks, beside which they awoke, sometimes, to find themselves uncomfortably near a den of rattlesnakes or the decaying carcass of an animal.

At every spot where a little grass was found, the cattle were unhitched from the wagons and turned out in pairs, under the yoke, to feed. Every stray bit of wood, every discarded ox-yoke or ox-bow, and not infrequently the

entire woodworks of an abandoned wagon, were split into firewood and carried along among the baggage for camping purposes.

Unknown guides, in whom the prolonged hardships of the plains had not destroyed the spirit of human kindness, left frequent notices on the rocks by the wayside, giving valuable information in regard to springs and streams, but for which there would have been terrible suffering at times from thirst.

The cattle were too weak and their loads too heavy to permit long hours of travel, and their progress was necessarily slow.

The beds of small streams had gradually dried under the fierce sunshine, and it became necessary to keep as near as possible to the banks of the Snake River, from which, however, the way often deviated for days together because of intervening rocks, gulches, sand, and sheer bluffs.

On the third day of August Jean made entry as follows:—

“The fiery weather of the past fortnight has moderated somewhat; but the roads are, as usual, rocky and dusty, with many stretches of sand, through which the poor, weak cattle pull the wagons, which, though lightened by the reduction of our loads, are far too heavy for their strength, which decreases daily.

“Our road, during the afternoon of to-day, lay close to the almost dry bed of a rocky-bottomed creek, beside which we camped for the night, without food for our stock, and almost without water. I wonder what the poor creatures think of us for bringing them out here in the wilderness, face to face with such a fate?

“Some of our teamsters have been growing quarrelsome of late. Two men who fell in with us shortly after our loss of cattle and have been following us ever since and begging food, suddenly left the train yesterday; since their departure some of our men are growing insubordinate.

"Their grievance arises from the inability of the cattle to haul them when not on duty as drivers, they assuming that they made no bargain with daddie to do any extra walking. Our teamster Yank, the aristocratic son of Virginia, who claims to be an F.F.V., climbed on a wagon-tongue early in the day, and compelled the oxen to pull his weight through the rocks and sand, the added strain upon their neck yokes making their lot doubly hard. Daddie is holding a conference with the fellow now. He said before we halted for the night that he hoped the dissatisfied ones would leave of their own accord, as otherwise he expected trouble. He announced to-night that there would be no more riding on wagon-tongues; and although we await the result of the conference with some anxiety, daddie says he is n't worried, since the dissatisfied fellows must stay with the train or starve.

"August 4. We travelled seventeen miles to-day, having halted for two hours to feast the cattle on a bed of dry bunchgrass, fortunately discovered by Scotty in a ravine overlooked by trains ahead. It was a great comfort to see the hungry animals fill themselves with the dry but nutritious grass, and drink their fill from a trench made in the bed of the dry creek.

"Three miles' further travel brought us to a bend in the creek, where we succeeded in digging again for water.

"August 5. We are in better spirits than at any time since our loss of cattle. All traces of mutiny have disappeared, and even Yank trudges over the road without protest. The animals, too, are stepping briskly.

"We find nothing at all for the cattle to eat to-day. The road continues rough and rocky, and abounds in chuck-holes which the narrow track will not permit the wheels to avoid. The tires are all loose on the wagon-wheels, and it seems a miracle that the wheels do not fall to pieces.

"After we halted for the night on the banks of the Snake River, once more our men were compelled to drive

the cattle down the stream for over a mile to find an opening between the bluffs through which they could reach water. And the men had to carry back a limited supply in their canteens to relieve the distress at camp. We are in plain and provoking sight of a foaming waterfall on the opposite bank, but as thoroughly out of reach of it as if it were in the mountains of the moon. It bursts from a ledge of rocks, and descends to the river with a roar that at this distance is sweetly musical. Some day, in the years to come, some enterprising individual will preëempt that spring, and make a fortune by selling the pure water to his less fortunate fellow-men.

"August 6. At ten o'clock to-day we were refreshed by a welcome shower.

"Oh, the blessed summer rain! How it cooled the parching air and arid earth, and revived the drooping spirits of poor dear daddie, who is growing hollow-eyed and thin, like the cattle!

"We find no game, and nothing for the stock to eat but some willows."

"Yonder," said Captain Ranger, in an excited tone, "are the falls of Salmon River. Make a note of them, Jean!"

The dilapidated wagons were halted on a great plateau overlooking a rapid river, spanned by a mighty ledge of rocks, over which a great torrent of foamy-white water rolled and surged, glistening in the sunshine with great schools of female salmon in quest of spawning-ground, followed by the male contingent, fierce of aspect and in fighting mood, ready to destroy one another or anything else that might impede their progress.

Indians were camped in great numbers below the bluffs, the women drying the fish for winter use, and the men bartering the produce of their skill with lance and spear for such articles of food and apparel as the depleted stores of the wanderers could spare.

"August 7. We travelled eighteen miles to-day. At ten o'clock we found a little plat of dry bunchgrass, and halted for an hour to allow the stock to graze. It was well we did, for to-night we find no grass at all. The river is over a mile from camp, and we are compelled to carry water all that distance for domestic use. We don't use very much."

For many miles the road continued through a rocky canyon, where the way was so perilous that the locked wagon-wheels had to be held in place by men on the upper side of the grade to prevent the wagons from tumbling down the bluffs into the raging current far below.

The entries in Jean's journal were interrupted at this time by a serious siege of toothache; and for this reason we find, under date of August 10 and 11, in Captain Ranger's painstaking chirography, the following entries:—

"We travelled about eight miles and again came to Snake River. The weather has been insufferably hot; and, as our weak and famished cattle were unable to go on, we were compelled to halt and await the coming of a breeze.

"The general face of the country is barren in the extreme. No vegetation is in sight except the ever abounding sagebrush. Gnarled, old, dwarfed, and shaggy, this seemingly boundless waste of sage subsists without apparent moisture; and for no conceivable purpose it lives on and on forever, staring stolidly at the sun by day and keeping vigil with the moon and stars by night."

On the 12th of August Jean made the following entry: "We reached the banks of the river every few miles to-day, and camped near it at night. We find here no grass, game, or fuel; but, thank God, there is plenty of water.

"After resting the cattle till sundown, daddie gave orders to yoke up and move ahead to a plat of grass that he had heard of, about six miles to the westward,

and half a mile to the left of the main travelled road. We were all packed, ready to start, when Shorty and Limpy came into camp, bringing about half of the cattle, and reported all the others missing. So we are compelled to await the morning with such forebodings as no pen can portray; mine at least will not make the attempt.

"August 13. The missing cattle were found and brought in at an early hour this morning; and after a hurried breakfast we started for the promised feeding-grounds, where we found good grass and water, but no fuel. We halted for a couple of hours, and then came on seven miles farther, when we once more reached Snake River.

"The dust throughout the day has been almost unbearable. It is as fine as the finest flour, and, being impregnated with alkali, is very irritating to nostrils, throats, and lungs.

"August 14. This has been the hardest day yet upon the cattle, — poor starved and wretched creatures! And I might add, poor alkali-ed and used-up people!

"Not a person in our company is well. We are a fretful, impatient, and anxious lot, and no wonder. And yet our journeyings even now have their amusing side. Susannah sings like a nightingale, and 'Geo'die Wah,' as her lisping coon calls himself, leads the chorus. Scotty quotes poetry by the yard, and the Little Doctor seeks diversion in every incident. Mrs. Benson continues amiable and obliging, showing a side to her nature wholly unlike the waspish way she had when we first knew her. The men often clear away the sagebrush from a level plat of ground after their chores are finished for the night, and hold dancing carnivals among themselves (daddie draws the line at dancing, so we don't participate). Sawed-off makes tolerable music on a fairly good violin. The humble jotter of these chronicles finds her chief diversion in the fact that we are every day drawing nearer to the Oregon City Post-office."

XXX

BOBBIE GOES TO HIS MOTHER

JEAN'S aching tooth suffered a relapse, and the supuration that ensued made her seriously ill.

On the 14th of August her father again made an entry: —

"Five of our escort have left us, taking with them a wagon-bed left by the wayside by somebody whose cattle have died or strayed. They made a clumsy boat of the square-bottomed thing; and with this frail craft, which they successfully launched in the tortuous waters of the Snake, they expect to find safe navigation to its confluence with the Columbia. Although it was a relief to get rid of some of them, chiefly because they thought they knew so much more about my business than I was able to learn, I am apprehensive of results solely on their account. Snake River does n't look to me like a safe stream to be trusted. But it was a relief to see them go, because we are yet many hundreds of miles from our goal, and our supplies of food and means of transportation are getting more precarious daily.

"August 15. Lost another ox by drowning.

"August 16. Weather insufferably hot. Lost an ox to-day from eating a poisonous herb. At this rate we shall soon be left with one wagon. The cattle must hustle for food after every day's pull, making it very hard to keep life in their poor skeleton bodies."

On the evening of the 18th Jean resumed her writing, which ran in part as follows: —

"The long and dreary road is rough and hilly, and the yielding sand is deep. We found to-day at noon a patch of dry grass, and stopped to graze our famishing cattle. But we neglected, by some mischance, to fill our water-

casks in the morning, so we had a dry luncheon in the hot sand, under the blistering sunshine. Our shoes have all given out from constant walking, and we are reduced to moccasins, which we get by barter among the Indian women. But the deerskin things afford us no protection from the still abounding cacti, which seem to thrive best where there is the least moisture.

"We are encamped once more on the banks of the Snake. It was quite dark when a halt was ordered.

"August 19. Glory to God in the highest! We are once more within sight of some trees that are not sagebrush. They are off to the westward, several miles away, and their stately presence marks the course of a stream we cannot see.

"August 20. The stream proved to be the Owyhee, — a lukewarm, clear, and rapid little river with a pebbly bottom. The air is so foul from the stench of decaying cattle, the water of the little river is so warm, and the heat so intolerable that sickness and death must soon ensue if the conditions do not change. It is no wonder that we see many graves by the roadside. Most of them are the last resting-places of mothers who have mercifully fallen asleep and been buried, often with their babes in their arms.

"August 21. Old Fort Boisé lies opposite our camp, away beyond and across Snake River, looming in the distance like a mediæval fortress from the midst of a gray, dry moat. Our printed guide, a little pamphlet written by General Palmer in the forties, tells us that this fort was built by the Hudson Bay Company for shelter and storage, and as a means of protection from the Indians, with whom the traders did a thriving business when the century was young. It is now fallen into decay, and is doubtless the abode of bats and birds and creeping things.

"The men who left our company on the 16th inst., in a boat made of a wagon-bed, rejoined us to-day, having had all the navigation on the Snake they seemed to

care for. They were a woe-begone and God-and-man-forsaken set; and their chief fear was that they would not be permitted to come into our train again on the old footing. Daddie — dear, big-hearted, hospitable man — took them in, though they deserved a different fate; but we think they'll be content to let the best that can be had alone hereafter.

"August 23. After a long, hot, and arduous journey of over thirty miles, and consuming two days of the most trying experience possible, we reached Malheur River, another tributary of the Snake. But we failed to find any food for the cattle, and were compelled to pull out again the next morning before dawn, headed for what appeared to be a stream of water, as we judged from a fringe of willows. But when we reached the bed of the stream it was dry as a bone. We were compelled to stop, though, as it was then high noon, and it was reported twelve miles to the next water. So a part of our force was detailed to dig a well in the creek bottom for water for domestic use, and the rest were sent back to the Malheur to water the stock, as soon as they had eaten their fill of the dry grass, which to us is more precious than gold, or anything else just now but water.

"On the 24th we left this camp and travelled down the dry bed of the creek for several miles, through a valley that had evidently been missed by the trains ahead; as the grass was fine and abundant. After leaving this valley, we travelled over a blind trail through a hot, dusty ravine till ten o'clock at night, when we reached some sulphur springs and encamped, feeling cross, half sick, and disgusted with all the world. The air is heavy with the fumes of sulphur, and Limpy says we are less than half a mile from hell."

On the 25th of August Jean's journal again gave evidence of Captain Ranger's chirography and style. His characteristic narrative follows: "To-day we made eight miles, which brought us to a deep and rocky canyon de-

bouching into the Snake. This is to be our last encounter with this tortuous, treacherous, and in every way terrible serpent, of whose presence we long ago had much more than enough.

"Three miles farther brought us to Burnt River, — a small, rapid, and crooked stream, with a sandy delta at its disproportionately extended mouth. Here the country changes its entire topography. The bold and abrupt foot-hills are covered to their tops with an abundant coat of seed-bearing bunchgrass; and numerous juniper-trees which somehow in the long ago gained a footing among the sloping shale and sand, lend a peculiar beauty to the scene."

"Mr. Burns, I'm going to die before long."

These were the words of little Bobbie, the darling of the family and of the entire company, and were spoken to Scotty on that memorable day in the Black Hills when preparations were in progress for the burial of his mother.

The blow came suddenly. The child had been overjoyed at the prospect of reaching the end of the journey at an early day. The sight of Burnt River filled him with pleasing anticipations. He was never more playful, quaint, and original than when his father stood him on his shoulder to view the last they should see of the Snake River.

"Where is it going now, papa?" he asked artlessly. "Is it always hungry? Is that what makes it in such a hurry? What does it eat? And where does it sleep o' nights? It's a sure enough snake, is n't it?"

At midnight, when the weary party were sound asleep, Mary, who was lying near him, was wakened by an ominous cough, which rapidly developed into an acute attack of croup.

"It was a stubborn case, and quite beyond my poor skill," said the Little Doctor, as they all stood weeping

around the still and beautiful form of the precious dead.

"What do you imagine caused the child to predict his untimely taking off, Mr. Burns?" asked Mrs. McAlpin, as they watched alone.

"I suppose it was merely a child's fancy, — a coincidence, probably."

"And I suppose it was a revelation. Many important lessons may be learned from the artless utterances of a child."

For many weeks Mrs. McAlpin had studiously avoided conversation on any subject with the one man on earth whom she believed to be her counterpart.

"Wait till that human imperfection called the Law has made me legally free," was her invariable command whenever her suitor showed symptoms of impatience.

But to-night, as they knelt together in the presence of what the world calls Death, he seized her hand, and it was not withdrawn.

"Kneeling in this presence, may I have my answer, Daphne?"

The dim light of a sputtering tallow candle shed a faint glow across the white sheet under which the still form of Bobbie lay in dreamless sleep.

She returned the pressure of his hand in silence. But when he would have caught her in a close embrace, she gently withdrew and whispered: "We will take our first kiss at the altar, darling."

"I am happy now, and I can wait. God bless you!" he whispered; and as others were about entering the tent, he arose from his knees and went out silently among the stars.

The morning came at last. Amid the tearful silence of the company the train moved on for a couple of miles and halted at the foot of a mountain to consign the mortal remains of the little soul to their last resting-place. High up on the mountain-side, on a natural terrace, the

grave was made under a spreading juniper-tree, in whose branches the wild birds chant his requiem as the years roll on, and the eternal breezes sing.

The next morning, August 29, found the face of Nature covered everywhere with a thick coating of hoar-frost. Ice had formed during the night in the water-pails, an eighth of an inch in thickness, and an inspiring sensation of chilliness filled the air. But as the sun rode high in the brassy heavens, the day grew intensely hot. On and on and up and up the ailing cattle labored; and on and on and up and up the dispirited company toiled, foot-sore and weary, ragged and dirty. But hope was not dead; for was not the goal of their ambition now almost in sight?

The mountains of Powder River were next crossed, and the weary pilgrims emerged upon an open plain over which the pygmy sagebrush of the desert ran riot. Here a quarter of a century later an enterprising city was destined to arise, in the midst of abounding mines and burdened wheatfields, wherein the irrigated lands would drop fatness and the stockman grow rich among the cattle of a thousand hills.

"This valley," wrote Jean, under date of September 1, "is beautiful to look upon; but it is considered worthless, as it is too dry for cultivation, and there is no way to rid the land of the ever-obtruding sage. Daddie says it will never be made to sprout white beans."

The ranchers, stock-raisers, mine-owners, merchants, artisans, mechanics, speculators, newspaper men, politicians, and successful schemers in every walk of life can well afford to forgive Daniel Webster, John Ranger, and every other false prophet who in his day harped on the same string, in view of the continuous fields of wheat, oats, barley, rye, vetch, hops, and fruits of all kinds peculiar to the temperate zone which this wonderfully fertile valley now produces under the impulse of irrigation, not

to mention the mines of gold and silver, precious stones, and baser metals with which the hills and mountains are fabulously rich.

The descent of the Ranger company into the now famous Grande Ronde valley was most perilous. It was made long after nightfall, through a precipitous and rocky defile, where a slip of the wagon-wheel or the misstep of an ox would have plunged the adventurous teams, wagons, men, women, children, and all, over sheer bluffs.

Camp was pitched in the edge of the beautiful valley, then a reservation belonging to the Nez Percé Indians. Rye-grass was growing as high as the top of the head of a man on horseback; and at one end of the valley, where now is a famous resort for health and pleasure, a number of hot springs were outlined by great columns of steam, which, rising beneath the arid air, hung low over the foot-hills, and, hanging lower yet in the vale below, spread itself like an enormous fleece over a lake of seething water.

XXXI

THROUGH THE OREGON MOUNTAINS

AFTER moving across the Grande Ronde valley through a veritable Eden of untamed verdure, and crossing the Grande Ronde River by ford, our travellers began the ascent of the Blue Mountains.

The air was cool and delicious. The cattle, much refreshed by their luscious feed in the bountiful and beautiful valley, moved more briskly than had been their wont, and were soon in the midst of the grand old forest trees, which, at that time untouched by the woodman's ax, stood in all their native grandeur upon the grass-grown slopes. In the midst of one of these groves of stately whispering

piners the company halted for the night near a sparkling spring, with scenery all around them so enchanting that Jean exclaimed in her journal, "Oh, this beautiful world! how big it is compared to the pygmy mortals who roam over its surface; and yet how little it is compared to the countless stars that gaze upon us from above this 'boundless contiguity of shade'!"

For several days she had written little. Her thoughts wandered to the Green River experience that had awakened within her being a new life, from which, for her at least, there was to be no ending. She could not write, so she strolled aimlessly away to a mossy rock in a starlit ravine, at the foot of which a rivulet was singing.

"Why can't I see you, mother dear?" she asked. "And you, Bobbie, can't you say a word to your sister Jean?"

For a long time she sat thus, lost in reverie, while the eternal silence around her was broken only by the low cadence of the whispering pines.

Suddenly there came into her inner consciousness a call, unspoken yet heard, "Jean!"

She closed her eyes and saw, as plainly as with physical vision, Ashton Ashleigh's border home; and he was gazing hard at Le-Le, who was kneeling at his feet in beseeching attitude.

"Jean!"

Gradually, as the demon Doubt aroused her senses, a wild, unreasoning jealousy crept into her heart. She turned her face to the eastward and sent out to him an answering call, "Ashleigh!"

She listened eagerly; but no response was felt or heard, and no mental vision reappeared. With her heart like lead, she returned to the wagon and crept into bed.

When she awoke the sun was shining, and she could not recall the vision that had distressed her. Had her

soul visited the abode of her heart's idol? Who knows? and who can tell?

On and on the teams kept crawling, until on the 6th of September the summit of the Blue Mountains was passed, and the wearied travellers gazed for the first time upon the Cascade Mountains, lying to the westward in the purple distance; and in their midst arose, supported by a continuous chain of undulating, tree-crowned, lesser heights, the majestic proportions of Mount Hood, the patriarch of the solitudes, his hoary head uplifted in the shimmering air, and at his feet a drapery of mist.

The Umatilla River left the gorges through which it had fought its way, and glided peacefully through a sagebrush plain toward the great Columbia. But no settlements were yet to be seen. No navigation had yet been started on the broad bosom of the upper Columbia. The rock-ribbed Dalles frowned far below in the misty distance; and no dream of a fleet of palatial river craft, with portage railways around otherwise impassable gorges, had yet taken practical shape. The Cascade locks had not entered the liveliest imagination, and a transcontinental railroad was considered an engineering impossibility, existing only in the mind of an impractical theorist or incurable crank.

A vast and practically level plain or upland lay between the Blue and the Cascade mountains. The Whitman settlement had already made the existence of the infant city of Walla Walla possible. Wallula and Umatilla were not, and the site of Pendleton was an unbroken plain.

But game was plenty and grass was good. Chokecherries and salmon-berries grew thickly among the deciduous groves that bordered the Umatilla River; and but for the sad bereavements in the Ranger family, which time alone could heal, the company would have been in exuberant spirits.

At Willow Creek station, which is now a veritable

oasis in the desert, the party found a trading-post, where some fresh potatoes and onions made a welcome change in the diet.

On the 13th of September Jean wrote: "Old friends and relatives, tried and true, have come to meet us from the Willamette valley, and their unexpected coming fills us with gratitude unspeakable."

After stopping merely to exchange greetings and gather what meagre tidings they could obtain from each end of the long and tedious road, the jaded immigrants pushed onward through the heat and dust till nightfall, when they came to a small stream, where they were compelled to halt for the night on account of the water, though the grass was poor and the cattle fared badly.

The relief party reported the Willamette valley as the "Garden of Eden," and gave glowing accounts of the soil, climate, scenery, and plenty with which the western part of the great Oregon country abounded. Even the dumb animals seemed to understand and take courage; for they stepped more briskly under the yoke and chewed the cud to a later hour than had been their wont.

Guided by the advice of the relief party, the train was again put in motion at midnight.

"It is fully twenty miles to the next camping-ground where there are wood and water," said a kindly recruit who had recently been over the road. It was a forced march, but the animals were well repaid for making it, as they found good water and a tolerable supply of grass.

"September 16. We are encamped near the mouth of the Des Chutes River," wrote Jean. "It is a clear, swift, and considerable stream which empties its waters into the Columbia.

"I know to-night just how Balboa must have felt when he discovered the Pacific Ocean. For have I not set eyes upon the lordly Columbia, the mighty river of the West, which

"Hears no sound save its own dashings'?"

The Des Chutes was safely forded by the teams, under the direction of an Indian guide, and the women and children were taken across it in a canoe.

The wild and broken desolation of the plains now gave way to vast alluvial uplands, — dry, owing to the season, but giving promise of great prosperity for future husbandmen. Numerous gulches intersected the otherwise unbroken level, upon which the teams would often come without warning; therefore travel was difficult and progress slow.

"If the season were not so far advanced, I'd like to stop over at The Dalles and visit the mission," said Captain Ranger; "but a storm is threatening, and it will never do to risk such an experience in the Cascade Mountains."

"Quite right you air!" exclaimed a mountaineer, who visited the train avowedly in search of a wife. None of the women or girls saw fit to accept the negotiations proposed; but his advice as to a coming storm was good. The train, in seeking to slip through the mountains by the way of Barlow's Gap, — a road made passable for teams by the indefatigable labors of an honored pioneer, whose name it perpetuates, — was halted just in time to prevent a disastrous ending.

Captain Ranger's worn and famishing cattle were reinforced at Barlow's Gap by two yokes of fat oxen sent to the rescue by an immigrant of 1850, — a grand and enterprising preacher of the gospel, who, all unknown, even to himself, was a striking example of a working parson, imbued with the practical idea of what constitutes a "Church of the Big Licks." Not that he was pugnacious, but he was philanthropic and practical and enterprising; and many are the beneficiaries of his industry and skill who have long survived his ministry, and date their material progress in Oregon, as well as their spiritual welfare, to this practical promoter of an every-day religion.

Provisions were by this time running short, and the necessity of reaching the settlements was imperative; but there was no appeal from the borderer's experience, and the impatient wayfarers were compelled to remain in camp for four consecutive days and nights, while the excited heavens warred among the serrated steeps, as

" From rock to rock leaped the live thunder."

The storm, which condensed its forces into a deluge of rain at both the eastern and western bases of the Cascade Mountains, had raged as snow in the forest-studded heights; and this, melting rapidly under the sunny skies which succeeded the heavy precipitation, made Barlow's Gap so slippery that the teamsters had to exercise the utmost care in guiding the oxen and to keep their own feet.

Provisions ran lower every day, and finally gave out entirely; and one jolly wayfarer, who had for many weeks professed to be enjoying the prospect of a ten-days' famine, grew so ravenous when compelled to face the reality at the foot of Laurel Hill, that he begged piteously for some coffee-grounds to ease the cravings of his stomach.

The next morning the three girls crossed the raging torrent of the glacial river Sandy by jumping from rock to rock over the roaring and perilous current, and gathered a bountiful supply of salal-berries for the children; but it was almost night before the half-starved men (who would not eat the purple fruit) were met by a packer, who brought beef and flour; and as soon as a fire could be kindled, a meal was made ready.

On the 27th of September the company descended the last long and rocky steep, and halted with a shout at the foot of the mountains on the famous Foster Ranch, where fresh vegetables, milk, cream, and butter were added to the beef and flour on which they had been glad to subsist when necessary.

On the thirtieth day of the month they reached Oregon City, and were royally welcomed by Dr. John McLoughlin, — the renowned, revered, and idolized hero of Old Oregon.

XXXII

LETTERS FROM HOME

OREGON CITY, in the autumn of 1852 and for more than a decade thereafter, consisted chiefly of a single narrow street bordering the Willamette River and lying under the sheer bluffs of lichen-clad basaltic rock that overlook the Falls of the Willamette, valued at that time only as a fishing site for the wily Indian and a strenuous leaping-place for schools of salmon. But future enterprise was destined to utilize the stupendous water-power for the convenience of man in the city of Portland, a dozen miles below. In this one narrow street the Ranger company halted to read letters from the States. These letters, many of them now nearly six months old, brought to them the first tidings from the old home. The latest was dated August 1, and was from Grandfather Ranger, announcing the transition of "Grannie," the beloved great-grandmother, whose demise was described with much detail: —

"She was in usual health up to the last day of her sojourn in the body," he wrote, "and retained her faculties to the last. She had walked to Lijah's and back during the day, with no companion but Rover, who deemed her his especial charge from the time he took up his abode with us. But she complained of being tired on her return, and ate less dinner than usual. While your mother and I were sitting at the table, we heard a peculiar gasp and gurgle from Grannie's chair in the next room, and

we hastened to her side; but she never spoke again, except in whispered messages of love to us all.

"We laid her precious remains in the family lot, in the dear, peaceful, leafy burying-ground of Glen Eden, and returned to our lonely home, and put away her empty chair. On the last morning of her earth-life, as she sat at breakfast with us, she said, 'I saw Joseph in my dreams last night. I heard him speak as plainly as if he had been in this room. He had a troubled look, but he said: "Tell mother I have written."' We thought little of it at the time; but to-day we had a letter from him, saying he is alive and well. He spoke of having seen you, John, but he said you had quarrelled with him, or rather at him, and had left him in a fit of anger. He did not say why you had quarrelled. But, oh, John, how could you do it? We know he must have given you cause, but you should, for our sakes, have risen above it. My old heart is heavy with sorrow. And your dear, patient mother, who has prayed so long and earnestly for this meeting between you two, — to think when her prayer is answered at last that you would add to it such a sting! No matter which one of you is the more to blame, you, my son, as the elder brother, should be the first to make concessions. I know your gentle Annie joins me in this appeal. She seems strangely near me as I write; and I can almost hear her say: 'To err is human; to forgive divine.' Give her and all the children our messages of love and sympathy."

The strong man wept convulsively. No tidings of his wife's transition had yet been despatched to the folks at home; nor could letters reach them now for a month to come. There was no overland mail, and all "through" letters sought transit *via* Panama.

A long postscript was added, over which father and children shed tears in unison. It said: "The dog, Rover, returned at nightfall on the memorable day of your departure, weary, wet, and bedraggled. He would take no

notice of me, your mother, or Grannie, although we all tried to pet and console him. But he went straight to your deserted doorstep, where he lay for a long time moaning like a man in pain. Grannie regularly carried him food, but he refused to eat for many days, and his wailing and howling could be heard at all hours of the night. But finally your mother won him over, and he now makes his home with us, and seems quite happy and contented. We all thought he would want to leave us and go back to the old house when Lijah took possession of it, but he did n't. He just clung all the closer to us old folks in the cottage; and it would have done your soul good to see the faithful watch he kept over dear old Grannie to the last day of her life. He was conspicuous among the chief mourners at the burial, and lingered alone beside the grave long after we all had returned to our homes."

Jean, recalling her father's words on that far-away ferry-boat, where she had last seen the faithful animal watching and wailing from the river-bank, said, as she looked up from reading her own letters: "Daddie, don't you think now that a dog has a soul?" And her father answered huskily: "I don't see why he has n't as good a right to a soul as I have."

"Here, Mame," said Jean, "is a letter from Cousin Annie Robinson. Listen. She says: 'Please break it gently to Cousin Mame that her *beau ideal* of a man, the Reverend Thomas Rogers, took to himself a wife before she had been gone a week. And who should it have been but that detestable Agnes Winter, who used to say such spiteful things about Mame? She won't be as happy after a while as she is now, but she'll know a whole lot more. Who could have believed that so saintly a sinner as the Reverend Thomas would prove so fickle? I hope Mame will see him with our eyes after this. He is n't worthy of her passing thought.'"

Mary, whose dreams for long and weary months had been of a package of letters from the preacher that never

came at all, faced suddenly the first great crisis in her life; and stilling, with a strong effort of the will, the tumultuous beatings of her heart, she walked rapidly on, ahead of the teams, from starting-time until nightfall, fighting her first great battle with herself alone, and gaining the mastery at last without human aid or sympathy.

The immigrants, having concluded their purchases, toiled up the narrow grade to the table-land above the bluffs, and pursued their way through the stately ever-green forests and level plains of the Willamette valley to the homes of relatives, who awaited their coming with joy that was changed to mourning when they learned for the first time of the death of Mrs. Ranger.

After a few days of much-needed rest among the hospitable pioneers who had preceded them by two years and were now installed on a beautiful and valuable donation claim, the immigrant party decided to remain in each other's vicinity, and removed for the purpose to a beautiful vista of vacant land under the friendly shadow of the Cascade Mountains, with a westward outlook across the Willamette valley to the Coast Range, which alone intervened to shut from sight the surging billows of the Pacific Ocean.

It was here that the genius and education of Scotty, who will hereafter be designated by his lawful name, proved of inestimable value. Supplied only with a rope and a carpenter's square, he led a private surveying party through the woods and prairies, locating their claims with such accuracy that the government survey, which was made years after, fully approved his work.

"You may not be a success at driving oxen or taking care of steers at night," said Captain Ranger, "but you are an artist with a rope and a square."

"Did n't I tell you he'd be worth his weight in gold when he reached a place where he could have a chance to use his brains?" asked Mrs. McAlpin, who took as

kindly and intelligently to her surroundings as if to the manner born.

"Women have a way of divination that I won't attempt to analyze," was the laughing reply.

The donation claim of each settler, the acreage of which had by this time been cut into halves by Act of Congress, was still of ample proportions, being a mile long and half a mile wide, and was so surveyed as to allow four families or claimants to settle on extreme corners of their land at points where four corners met.

"This will enable each claimant to build a cabin on his own claim, so he can reside upon and cultivate his own land, as required by the law, and at the same time have neighbors within call in case of accident or other need," said Mr. Burns.

"What a grand and glorious prospect!" exclaimed Captain Ranger, standing on an eminence where his new house was to go up, and gazing abroad over the wide expanse of the Willamette valley, in which the winding river was gleaming through the openings in the forest; "but I can sense one drawback to your scheme, Mr. Burns."

"What is it?"

"Some of us will be getting married before long and doubling our opportunity for holding government lands; and as each must reside upon and cultivate his claim and his wife's, it will make it a little awkward, won't it?"

"Not if the contracting parties exercise a little ordinary business ability and discretion, sir. They have but to locate their claims with a view to matrimony and settle their own bargains to suit themselves."

But the Captain, who had dealt with the domestic infelicities of his neighbors too often to look upon all such bargains as imbued with old-time stability, had his doubts.

"If an engaged couple should tire of their bargain, and their change of sentiment should fail to fit the agreement, — what then?"

"It would be a blessing for them to discover their mistake in time to forestall the divorce court," was the ready reply.

"Mr. Burns is right," said Mrs. McAlpin. "Two-thirds of the unhappy marriages we hear about are the result of haste and lack of understanding. A couple will marry, and when it is too late to recede from the bargain they want to break it. I don't mind telling you, Captain Ranger, that Mr. Burns and I expect to marry each other some day, and our claims were chosen accordingly; but we'll wait until the law frees me from a bargain which I repudiated in spirit before it was consummated. And we'll not marry then if we conclude we are making a mistake."

"I am glad to hear you make so open and frank a statement in the presence of so competent a witness," exclaimed Mrs. Benson, who still carried an important note in her pocket, frayed and travel-soiled, but none the less precious from being scarcely legible.

"I think it is a shame to make a commercial bargain of a matrimonial agreement," exclaimed Mary Ranger.

"And so do I!" echoed Jean.

Nevertheless, when the boundaries of the several donation claims were established, and the different allotments were assigned to the proper claimants, it was noticed that, in addition to the Captain's own quota of virgin acres, an extra claim was reserved adjacent to that of each of his daughters, Mary and Jean, and one next to that of Sally O'Dowd.

"Equality before the law is a fundamental idea in the government of the United States of America," the Captain explained at the Land Office; "and I am glad to see it practically applied to the property rights of the pioneer

women of Oregon. It is a good beginning, and none can see the end."

"Sally O'Dowd is n't a free woman, and she can't get married, thank goodness!" cried Jean, as she and her sisters talked the matter over together between themselves alone.

"That's so," echoed Mary. "Sally has a husband living, and so there is no danger of our losing father."

"Let's not be too certain," cried Jean. "If you'd kept your eyes open for the last month, as I have, you would n't be surprised at anything. Sally's case was up on appeal when she left the States, but it has doubtless gone by default. She has the custody of her children, and that was all she asked of Sam O'Dowd."

"Then Sally is a free woman," said Marjorie.

"No woman is free when she is married," retorted Jean. "The laws of men do not recognize the individuality of a married woman. I, for instance, am Jean Ranger to-day, but if I should marry to-morrow, I'd be —"

"Nothing but a nonentity named Mrs. Ashton Ashleigh," interrupted Mary. "Women delight in surrendering their names in marriage to the man they love."

"You're right," cried Jean, her eyes blazing. "I'd surrender to-morrow if Ashton would come to claim his own. But it would be a partnership, and not a one-sided agreement."

"That's what every woman thinks when she puts her neck in the noose," laughed Marjorie; "but when the man comes along who is able to capture her heart, she is ready to make the venture."

"That's because the fundamental principle of matrimony is correct," retorted Jean.

"Dat's so, honey," said Susannah. "Women is jist like pigs. When one of 'em burns his nose in a trough o' hot mash, dey'll all hurry to 'vestigate an' git de same sperience."

"Of course you 'll get some land," said Jean.

"I've done axed de Cap'n 'bout it, an' he's looked up de law. He says I can't take up no lan' 'cos I'm nothin' but a niggah. De laws o' Oregon are ag'in it; so are de laws o' de gen'ral gov'ment. A free country's a great blessin' to women an' niggahs! It's a great blessin' to be bawn in a free country; ain't it, Geo'die Wah?"

The coon, who had grown and flourished under his six months' regimen of flapjacks and bacon, shook his bright brown curls and grinned, displaying an even set of polished ivories.

"I could n't git married if I wanted to," added the negress, "'cos the law is sot ag'in mixed matches; but da'hs no law nowhar ag'in coons"; and she ended her harangue with a characteristic "Yah! yah! yah!"

"Then, if you can't marry, you can always work for wages, Susannah; and you'll be better off than Mrs. McAlpin," — she was coming to join the group, — "who is going to be married soon, if I can read the stars correctly," laughed Marjorie.

"No, Marjorie; I cannot even talk of marriage with the man whom God created for me, and me only. I am not even a grass widow. I cannot legally file upon a claim because I am the victim of a marriage I cannot honor. And the law cannot set me free because the party of the second part objects."

"What's that you were saying to the Ranger girls, Daphne?" asked Mrs. Benson, who had been engaged in assisting Captain Ranger and Mr. Burns to plan the two sets of log houses that were to be erected a mile apart, and to be so arranged as to form separate abodes for four families.

"Nothing, mamma, only I was bewailing my fate."

"Come with me, Daphne; I have something to show you," said Mrs. Benson, in a low tone.

"Listen to this letter," said the mother, as soon as they

were seated among the trees. "The time has come for you to know its contents:—

"MY DEAR MRS. BENSON,—You have been a brave, devoted mother to an unhappily envired daughter. I have long known that you and I were made for each other. We became mismatched through adherence to false customs. Daphne does not love me, and has never willingly accepted our union, as you have painful reason to know. You love me! Pardon this abrupt announcement. You have never told me so, but I have known the truth for years. To have this opportunity to tell you that I reciprocate, is at present my only joy.

"I will meet you in the wilds of Oregon. Daphne's latest erratic movements to escape me have all along been known. To follow you I became a wanderer in these Western wilds. I will take measures to set your beautiful daughter free. A couple whom God hath *not* joined together it is man's duty to put asunder. Keep your own counsel till such time as you are strong enough to take your life and destiny into your own hands, and declare yourself accountable primarily to yourself and God for your own actions.

"I will be in Portland, Oregon, by November first. We shall surely meet again.

"Faithfully, through time and for eternity, your devoted but never yet accredited counterpart,

"DONALD MCPHERSON."

The daughter clasped her mother's hand and fervently exclaimed, "Thank God!"

Mrs. Benson wept.

"It will never do for you and me to meet again after this revelation," said the daughter, after a long silence. "I will take up my permanent abode in this new country, and you can rejoin Donald in New York or Philadelphia, *via* the city of Panama. But you must go to Portland now. We will not set idle tongues to wagging here. It is fortunate indeed that Donald took his mother's name as a part of his last inheritance."

XXXIII

LOVE FINDS A WAY

"**Y**OU need n't select any lands for me, Captain," said Mrs. Benson. "I have decided to go to Portland to-morrow with the team that's going down for supplies. I shall not return. But my daughter will remain and take a claim. She has decided to turn rancher, but I do not like the life."

"Is n't this a rather sudden change in your programme, Mrs. Benson?"

"Not at all. I did n't intend to remain when I came here. I would n't have come any farther than Oregon City, but I wanted to get a view of the future home of Daphne; and now, as she has chosen for herself and has a fair prospect of happiness ahead, I am ready to look out for myself. I shall stop awhile in Portland, and be ready to take the next steamer for San Francisco. I will go to New York by way of the Isthmus, and will spend the evening of my days in Paris or London."

"I'm sure I wish you well, Mrs. Benson."

"Thank you, Captain. My heart is too full for words! I know you will always be a friend to my dear daughter."

"You surely do not mean to go where you can never see your daughter again!"

"Yes, Captain. Do you recall that tall and bronzed and handsome man of whom you bought the buffalo robe you gave to your wife a short time before her death?"

"You mean Donald McPherson?"

"Yes, sir. The fates have settled it. He is to be my husband, and Daphne and I must part."

"You have my best wishes for success and happiness," said the Captain, earnestly, as he offered his hand.

"There is some peculiar mystery about all this!" he

exclaimed to himself the next day, as Mrs. Benson climbed into the wagon and started off to meet her fate. "But it's the way of women. They are as fickle as the wind." He thought bitterly of his own budding and now blighted hopes.

"Don't grieve for her, Daphne," said Mr. Burns, in a husky voice, as the wagon disappeared. "She was kind to me when I was crippled and cross, and I shall never forget her watchfulness and care for me under the most trying conditions. She is your mother, too, and that of itself is enough to inspire my everlasting gratitude. I have no respect for the man who fails to appreciate the woman to whom he is indebted for his wife."

"It is well for the three of us that we have learned our lesson, Rollin. We are all young yet, and all eternity is before us."

"Yes, Daphne! Eternity is both before and behind us. We are henceforth to be all in all to each other, as I believe we have been in the past, my darling."

"No, Mr. Burns, do not 'darling' me yet. We must await the tardy action of that human imperfection called the law before I can honorably become your 'darling.'"

Nevertheless, being human, she feigned not to notice the prolonged pressure of his hand at parting, nor did she refrain from answering his eager and tender gaze with a look that quickened every pulse and sent a thrill of gladness to his heart.

At the primitive hotel in the primitive little city of Portland, Mrs. Benson met an Indian woman, the mother of many children, who was introduced to her as Mrs. Addicks. The woman was richly and stylishly gowned and seemed much at home among the guests. Her mien and carriage were queenly, as she moved about the little parlor, exchanging a word here and there among the loiterers, with whom she seemed a general favorite.

"Have n't I met you somewhere before?" asked Mrs.

Benson, with whom, in truth, she had exchanged greetings on the plains under circumstances quite different from the present, as one, at least, had cause to remember.

"I do not recall a former meeting, madam. But you might have met me on the plains. I was on my way to Portland when you saw me, if you saw me at all. A frontier trading-post is no proper place to bring up a lot of Indian half-breeds. I came here to educate my children."

"Then your husband is a white man?"

"Yes."

"I beg your pardon, but you do not speak and act like the other Indians I have met."

"I am a chieftain's daughter, and I was educated in London. You spoke of travelling in the Ranger train. Mr. Ranger is my husband's brother."

"Does Captain Ranger know of this?"

"I neither know nor care! One thing is certain. I shall do my best to train and educate my children in such a way that he will be proud some day to own them as relatives. I have the girls in school at the Academy of the Sacred Heart. The boys are at the Brothers' School."

"Do you know Dr. McLoughlin?"

"Yes, and my husband knows him well. I saw him as the children and I passed through Oregon City. He was very kind, and bade me be of good cheer. He has an Indian wife himself, as you know. But he did not ask me in to see her, so we did not meet."

As Donald McPherson had not yet arrived in Portland, Mrs. Benson had ample leisure for letter-writing.

"My dear Daphne," she wrote, "a letter from Mr. McPherson awaited me, as I expected. He had sent it forward by a courier from the plains, in care of one of Dr. McLoughlin's agents. I need not repeat its contents. Suffice it to say, that I am serene and calm. God has been very merciful to us all. Within the letter was a

their claims, told heavily upon the men, who, already depleted in strength by much hardship, were poorly equipped for their tasks. But there was no shirking of duties nor complaint over backaches, and the borderers' homes arose like magic.

"How do you like the appearance of the new buildings?" asked Captain Ranger, addressing Sally O'Dowd.

"Why should you ask me?" was the curt response.

Surprised at her reply but disposed to be communicative, he added: "If all goes well, I'll have a sawmill up yonder in the timber by this time next year."

"That's none of my business," she retorted testily.

He looked at her for a moment in blank astonishment. "Why is n't it your business?" he asked, at length. "Have n't we agreed to first get you free from a bad bargain, and after that take up our line of march together? And won't your belongings then be mine, and mine yours?"

"What about that other woman you are going to Portland to see? Do you take me for an idiot, Squire?"

He looked her in the face for an instant, nonplussed. Then as the reason for her change of manner dawned upon him, he threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"So that's what the matter with us, is it?" he exclaimed, approaching her with a proffered caress. "We've been a trifle jealous, have n't we?"

"Behave yourself, sir!" elbowing him away. "Go to Portland and see that other woman. No doubt a party by the name of Benson is expecting you."

He guffawed again, making her angrier still.

"Come, Sally; let's have no more nonsense," he said, after his laughter had ceased, motioning her to a seat beside him on the doorway.

She stood irresolute.

"Very well, if you prefer to do so, you can sit a-standing, like the Dutchman's hen. I've been keeping a letter that's been burning my pocket for three days waiting for

an opportunity to show it to you, Mrs. O'Dowd; but you've been so shy I could n't touch you with a forty-foot pole."

"What do you suppose I care for your letters from that other woman?" she asked, dropping into the space in the doorway, all eagerness and attention, in spite of her disclaimer.

"Read it yourself, Sally. It is from my brother-in-law, Lije Robinson."

"The latest sensation is the suicide of Sam O'Dowd," the letter went on to say, after the usual preliminaries of the border scribe.

"No!" cried the widow, now such *de facto*, rising to her feet and turning deathly pale. "Sam would n't commit suicide. He'd be afraid to meet his Maker."

"But he did it, Sally. Read on."

"He left a confession, saying it was remorse that drove him to it, and extolling his wife as a model woman, whom he had wronged beyond reparation in every way imaginable.

"His mother is wellnigh crazy. The home the two of them had wrested from his wife and her mother, in which the old woman had allotted to spend her days, goes back to Sally now, as, by his confession, his mother has no right to it."

"Poor Sam!" cried the widow, dropping again into the proffered space in the doorway. "He had his faults, but he was n't all bad. This letter and his confession prove it. I shall try hard to think that he atoned for his greatest crime by his voluntary death. But I'd be sorry myself to meet the reception that he'll get in heaven!"

"Why, Sally? What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Let the dead past bury its dead."

Captain Ranger, who, in first proposing matrimony, had stated earnestly that his heart was still with Annie, gazed tenderly at the weeping woman, who arose and

stood before him in a mute yet beseeching attitude, while a warm love for her sprang spontaneously within him.

"Come, Sally dear," he pleaded; "sit down by me again, and let us talk it out."

She obeyed mechanically, her frame convulsed with weeping.

"I can never talk again about a platonic union," he said feelingly. "I know that Annie would sanction our marriage now if she could speak to us; and I believe with all my heart that she knows of our proposed relations, and that she will, under the peculiar circumstances, also approve."

Ah, John Ranger! Materialist as you used always to proclaim yourself, you cannot, in the deepest recesses of your soul, rebel against the faith that is "the evidence of things not seen." What have you done with your agnosticism?

"Captain," said Sally, in a subdued tone, "I have seen the day when I would have followed Sam O'Dowd to the ends of the earth if he had commanded. I could and would have lived on the acorns of the forest rather than have failed to be his wife. Do not ask me to love you now. I cannot be your wife."

"Are we not engaged?" he asked, astonished.

"Yes; conditionally. But I cannot think about it now. If I can ever bring myself to think it right for me to be your wife, I will not hesitate to tell you so. But not now, Captain; not now."

She arose abruptly, and was gone.

XXXIV

HAPPY JACK INTRODUCES HIMSELF

"**H**ERE," said Jean, the next morning, approaching her father, who was hard at work by sunrise, "are the letters I promised to write to Mr. Ashleigh and his mother. You stipulated that you should see them, as you will remember."

His head and heart were aching. "I don't care a rap for your nonsense," he exclaimed. "Nothing'll ever come of it. The fellow has never written to you."

"That's so!" thought Jean, strolling off aimlessly into the woods. "Daddie gave him our address as Oregon City. Oh, my God! can it be possible that my other self has been married (or the same as married) to Le-Le, the Indian slave?"

Giant trees rose often to the height of three hundred feet, — one hundred and fifty feet from the ground without a limb, — and so straight that no hand-made colonnade could equal them for grace and symmetry. As Jean stood under these stately monarchs of the soil and listened to the soft sighing of the wind among their evergreen leaves, she heard the roar of rushing water. She clambered through a labyrinth of deciduous undergrowth till she came to a horseshoe bend at the head of a gulch, over which the water foamed and tumbled till lost from sight amid the tangled ferns and foliage.

"Halloa!" cried a voice from an unseen source.

She looked in the direction whence the call seemed to proceed, and beheld, standing on the opposite bluff, a typical young backwoodsman, tall and shapely.

She returned the salutation by waving her sunbonnet, which she had been swinging aimlessly by its strings,

exposing her face and head to the caress of the balm-laden air.

A minute later, and the stranger was by her side. She noticed that he carried in a careless way a long, old-fashioned rifle; that a pipe was in his mouth, and a pistol of the "pepper-box" variety protruded from the leg of his boot.

"Are you the Ranger gal what got left at Green River?"

She turned ghastly pale at mention of the locality where her thoughts were centred, but made no audible reply.

"My name is Henry Jackman, — better known as Happy Jack," he said, as he dropped the butt-end of his rifle to the ground with a thud, and stood waiting for her to speak.

"I've heard of you before," said Jean; "you are the man who's been talking sawmill to my daddie."

"That's what!"

"Then we may as well become acquainted. I am Jean Ranger, and I have an older sister Mary and a younger one named Marjorie, besides my brother Hal and two little sisters."

"I seed yer dad yisti'dy an' we talked things over. Thar's a fine prospec' hyer fur a sawmill."

"So I perceive."

"Yer dad an' me's goin' to go snucks."

"I do not understand."

"I mean pardners. He's got the sabé an' I've got the rocks, so we can make a go of it. The kentry's settlin' up powerful fast, an' thar'll be lots o' demand for lumber for bridges an' barns an' houses an' fencin' an' sich."

"I see. We had a lot of spavined, wind-broken old horses for our sawmill power in the States, sir."

"Thar's a water-power yander that beats hosses all to thunder, miss."

"So I see, sir."

"Thar's millions o' feet o' logs in sight; an' out

yander in the mountains is a place to build a flume, so we kin raf' the logs down to a lake that I found up thar in the woods. We'll have a town here some day an' make things hum."

"Have you often met my daddie?" asked Jean.

"I'm lookin' fur him now, every minute. We're goin' to survey some timber-land fur the mill-hands, farther up the crick. The curse o' this kentry is bachelers. Ah! here's the Cap'n now. It's lucky you've brought along so many weemen folks, ole man; we'll all be needin' wives."

This concluding remark brought the hot blood of indignation to the cheeks of Jean as she turned to meet her father, who was carrying an ax and a gun, followed by Mr. Burns, equipped with a clothes-line and a carpenter's square.

"What in thunder are you doing out here, Jean?" asked her father, taking no notice of the stranger's remark. "Don't you know that the woods are full of wild beasts?"

"I've seen nothing wilder than your prospective 'pardner,'" she answered aside. "He seems harmless; but he's an ignoramus and a boor."

"Very well, Jean. But run home now, and help the women folks. They have a whole lot o' work on hand, getting settled, and you do like to shirk."

"Thar'll be lots more of it for 'em to do afore this timber is all sawed up," added the prospective "pardner." "It takes a mountain o' grub to keep a lot o' loggers in workin' order. I'm mighty glad, Cap'n, that you've got a lot a weemin folks; we'll need 'em in our business."

"Yes," retorted Jean. "They're as handy to have in the house as a coffin with the proper combination of letters on the plate!"

Mr. Burns laughed; but Mr. Jackman dropped his lower jaw and looked the picture of an exaggerated in-

terrogation point. "What's the gal drivin' at?" he asked under his breath; and her father said gravely, "Stop talking nonsense, Jean."

It was mutually agreed upon that a logging-camp should be started at once, and the ground prepared during the coming rainy season for the foundation and erection of a combined sawmill, planer, and shingle-mill, and that Captain Ranger should return, as early as practicable, to the States, *via* the Isthmus, to purchase the necessary machinery, which could not at that time be procured on the Pacific Coast.

Soon thereafter Captain Ranger went to Portland to purchase the necessary supplies for the winter's use. Arriving there, he repaired, in his best Sunday suit, to the primitive hotel, and inquired for Mrs. Addicks.

The lady appeared, after long waiting, fastidiously gowned and so thoroughly at ease that all his thought of the superior quality of the white man's blood departed as he saw her, and he stood in her presence in embarrassed silence.

"Won't you be seated, Mr. —"

"Ranger," he said, fumbling his hat awkwardly and shambling into the proffered chair.

"To what am I indebted for this visit, Mr. Ranger?"

"You will please excuse me, ma'am," he said, crossing his legs clumsily, "but I have come to see you on a little business that concerns us both. Your husband is my brother."

"Then, sir, you can tell me something about his family. Do his parents yet live?"

"They were alive and well at last accounts; but it takes two months or more for a letter to go and come. Our grandmother died recently."

"The dear old lady he calls 'Grannie'?"

"Yes."

"My husband will be grieved to hear of this. I must

write to him at once. Can you give me any particulars concerning her last days? Did she remember Joseph?"

"She had a dream of him, and said his mother would live to see him again."

"I used to wonder why my husband was so reticent about his family affairs. I supposed when we were married that he would take me back to live among his people. But he steadfastly refused to do it, and would not even let me know their post-office address. But I know all about it now. He left home under a cloud."

"But it was not nearly so bad as he thought. I set his mind at rest on that score when we had that last interview. The poor fellow was in daily dread of discovery and pursuit for more than a dozen years."

The woman arose and paced the floor in silence, the coppery hue of her complexion enriched by the blood that rushed to her face. She paused and stood before him, her hands folded over the back of a chair, as she waited for him to speak again.

"I did your husband a grievous wrong when I saw him at the post, madam. I must confess that I had no idea that the Indian woman he told me that he had married was —"

She waved her hand in protest. "There, there, Mr. John; no flattery, if you please. If you had seen me as I was that day, you would have felt justified in spurning your brother's wife. It was not my fault, though, that he kept me like a common squaw. Your conduct is fully forgiven, since it resulted in an open declaration of independence on my part.

"There were a dozen young chieftains and half as many white men who aspired to my hand and heart in my girlhood; but Joseph was a king among them all. But we had not been married a month before I found that I was doomed to the same treatment, as his wife, that other Indian wives endure. So I lost heart, and

accepted the situation as stolidly as my father would have done if he had been doomed to perpetual slavery."

"Did Joseph always treat you badly after your marriage?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Hard times came to our tribe. The Hudson Bay Company's business languished. We had a succession of bitter cold winters, with dry, hot summers following. The different tribes became involved in war. Then famine came, and pestilence. We will draw a veil over what followed, Mr. John. Joseph will never beat his wife again; I have sworn it!

"The fluctuations of fortune brought us at last to the Utah trading-post, where you saw Joseph. We were prosperous then, and might have lived like white folks; but he seemed to prefer to keep me situated like an ordinary squaw, so I gave him all he bargained for. But, ugh! I did detest the life. Finally my father died and left me an ample inheritance, which is mine absolutely. I will educate my children and take them to London, where there is no prejudice against my people such as abounds in this 'land of the free and home of the brave'!"

"Do you think Joseph is able to repay a part of the money we lost on his account?"

"My husband will waste more money in a single night sometimes, at the gambling-table, than he will expend on his family in a year. I think he is quite able to pay his debts."

"How would you like to visit our people back in the old home?"

"When our children reach the age of six or seven years, they begin to outgrow the Indian style and complexion," she said; "but I'll not take them among my husband's people while they look like little pappooses."

"Why not take them out to my donation claim? My family will be glad to welcome you."

"Could n't I take my nurse along?"

"If you did, some fool would coax her to marry him, so he and she could hold a double quota of land. Better leave her here with your little ones, or set her to washing dishes."

"In either case our landlord would marry her himself, I fear. But I'll risk it."

The older girls were out of school for a walk, in the company of their brother John and a black-robed Sister, and thus were permitted at this juncture to enter their mother's presence for an introduction to their uncle.

"John and Annie are Rangers, as you see, sir. My husband is very proud of them."

"And well he might be," thought the Captain, as he scanned them critically.

The sun was sinking behind the Coast Range the next evening, throwing the picturesque valley of the Willamette into deep shadows, and lighting up the tops of the Cascade heights with tinges of rose and gold, and purple, when a carriage and pair were seen ascending the narrow grade leading to the great log house occupied temporarily by all the families of the Ranger colony. The unexpected arrival of the Captain created a sensation, which was not at all abated when he vaulted to the ground, followed, before he could turn to assist her, by a large, well-formed, and faultlessly attired Indian woman, with a sheen of gold in her raven-hued hair.

"Mrs. O'Dowd," said the Captain, offering his hand, "allow me to introduce Mrs. Ranger Number Two, — my brother Joseph's wife."

XXXV

ASHLEIGH MAKES NEW PLANS

WHEN Henry Jackman saw the wife of Joseph Ranger, whom he had known at the trading-post in Utah as Mr. Addicks, and understood the full significance of her arrival as a welcome visitor and relative of the Ranger family, he shrugged his shoulders and walked away, exclaiming: "I'm dummed!"

"No wonder Uncle Joe was captured by that fine creature," said Jean to herself. "She must have been as handsome in her girlhood as Le-Le." And for the first time in her life she fainted away.

When she awoke to consciousness, which was not till the next morning, she was on the big white bed in the spare chamber, whither she had been carried by loving friends and treated through all the watches of the night by the Little Doctor with the untiring faithfulness of a devoted friend.

"Take that Indian away! I cannot bear the sight of her," cried Jean, as her copper-colored aunt approached her, proffering kindly offices.

"She must be humored in her whims till she has had time to recover, Mrs. Ranger," said Mrs. McAlpin, aside. "There's a love story and a disappointment behind all this. Her antipathy is not against you, but another Indian princess whom she thinks she has cause to remember."

"I didn't come here to make wounds, but to heal them," faltered Mrs. Ranger, as, with an indistinct conception of the trouble, she left the room, followed by Sally O'Dowd.

"I want you to know that you have healed my wounds," said Sally. "I was miserably and unreason-

ably jealous of — I did n't know of whom — for a whole week before you came to us. I shall never be such a simpleton again."

"My wise brother says you and he have concluded to marry each other, Mrs. O'Dowd."

"We were engaged for a short time, but when I overheard him talking to himself about going to Portland 'to see a woman,' and he would n't take me into his confidence about her, I got angry and jealous, and treated him shabbily."

They found the Captain, of whom they went in quest, in his favorite seat on the front doorstep.

"I don't see why you and Joseph cannot go together to visit your parents this winter," said Mrs. Ranger, coming at once to the point. "Your partner can have ample time while you are away to get the foundations ready for the mill and other buildings. I will write to Joseph this very night and urge it if you say so."

The Captain looked inquiringly at Mrs. O'Dowd.

"I quite agree with your brother's wife," she said, extending her hand. "I was an idiot to act toward you as I did."

"With your permission, I will write at once to Joseph, explaining everything and urging him to come to the ranch at once. The courier goes out to-night, so there is no time to lose."

"Yes," said Sally, whose eyes were blazing with a new joy, "it is just as Wahneta says. You can be spared better this winter than later. Will you go if Joseph consents to accompany you?"

"And leave you behind?"

"It would be very humiliating to your family and embarrassing to both of us for me to return as your wife to the old home of your Annie, John."

"But you'll marry me before I start?"

"No, John," she said, the tears welling to her eyes; "we owe to your Annie's people a tender regard for

their feelings. If we were to be married before you visit them, they could never be reconciled to me."

"I must consult my partner," said the Captain. "He may not want me to leave at this time. The fellow is terribly unreasonable at times."

"Is that 'fellow,' as you call him, your master?" asked Mary, who was passing, on her way to the milk-house. "He's been hanging around the house ever since sun-up, waiting for a chance to see Jean. He's depending on the three of us to keep the boarding-house, and he wants to marry Jean, to stop her wages."

"Excuse me, ladies; I must see my partner at once," said the Captain, as he hurried away.

It required much persuasive argument to secure the consent of Happy Jack to Mrs. Joseph's proposition; but he yielded at length, as men are wont to do when women to whom they are not married combine to carry a point.

The outgoing courier was to leave Oregon City at sunset, and it was necessary to write many letters for the overland mail, destined for Salt Lake and the few intervening points along the route.

Among the missives was one from Jean to Ashton Ashleigh, containing only a few sentences:—

"I have loved you more than life, but I have awaited tidings from you till hope is dead. I wrote a letter for your mother, but it was not sent to her because I had not heard from you. You will understand. I am deeply wounded, but I shall not die. I shall do my duty and be honest with myself, no matter what others may do or be.

"A man who styles himself Happy Jack has come among us, who wants to make me his wife. He is forming a partnership with daddie in the sawmill business; and he insinuates that you have married Le-Le. Does this explain your silence?"

A fortnight passed, and Ashton Ashleigh read this

letter by the flickering light of a smoking kerosene lamp. Siwash lay on a buffalo robe in a corner, reading; and near him sat Le-Le, making a cunningly wrought moccasin.

The wind outside was rising. The ice-laden chains and pulleys of the idle ferry-boat resounded to its attack like a thousand-stringed Æolian harp. Suddenly, under a louder and more furious blast than any that had preceded it, the ice-incrusted cables snapped asunder, and the frozen boat crashed through the ice blockade, her timbers breaking as if made of withes.

Ashleigh opened the door and peered out into the moonlight. White clouds rolled over and over one another, and the stark white landscape seemed alive with flurrying snow.

"Good-bye, Green River Ferry," he said. "This is a fitting finale to my cherished hopes. Oh, Jean! my bonnie Jean! To think that the end should be like this!"

"The ferry-boat is gone, Le-Le," he said the next morning. "Your ransom price has been paid, and you are, as you know, a slave no longer. I am going away. Take good care of Le-Le, Siwash, my boy; and take good care of yourself also."

The girl's English vocabulary was too meagre to admit of much expostulation in speech, but her wailing was blood-curdling as she knelt at his feet, alternately embracing his knees and tearing her hair.

"I have made a terrible mistake, poor girl," he cried, tearing himself away, "but I meant only to be kind. It was my dream to set you free and take you with me to — to — her. But now I see that it will be impossible!"

Le-Le, still wailing, prepared his breakfast. Siwash brought his mules to the door, in stolid obedience to orders, his face as expressionless as flint.

"The white man's heart is hard, like the hoof of the

buffalo," he said to Le-Le in her native tongue. "You mistook his kindness for love. But never mind. You'll get over it."

Two days of steady travel through the solitudes brought Ashleigh to the lodgings of the post-trader, Joseph Ranger, alias Addicks.

"Your wife," John had written to his brother, "has come to visit us at the Ranch of the Whispering Firs, as my girls have named our donation claims, to hold which we have pooled our issues, and have filed upon them as individuals. My family are charmed with her. Do join us here at once. Take a donation claim near to one or more of ours. Forget bygones. And, best of all, go with me this winter, by the Isthmus route, to the dear old home. Do say yes, Joe, and we may all be happy yet."

"Halloa!" cried Ashleigh, as he alighted at the post.

"Well," cried Joseph Ranger, as he opened his canvas door; "it's Ashleigh. Come right in! You're the very man I wanted to see."

A savory odor of hot biscuits and frying ham greeted the nostrils of the benumbed and hungry wayfarer.

"This supper smells good, Mr. Addicks."

"Mr. Addicks no more, if you please, Mr. Ashleigh. My name is Ranger, — Joseph Ranger. I have found myself, and I shall be known by my real name hereafter. But help yourself to pot-luck. And please excuse me. I have just begun to read a letter from the coast. The courier has n't been gone five minutes."

After Ashleigh had finished his meal his host thrust the letter in his face and said, "What do you think of that?"

"What do you propose to do?" asked Ashleigh, after carefully considering the missive.

"Why, go to Oregon, of course. What else could a fellow do? But I don't know what in the dickens to do with my stuff."

"You can leave me in charge, if you like. You can invoice at your lowest selling-price, and I'll make what profit I can on the venture and close it out in the spring; that is, if you do not care to return next year."

"The good Lord has taken pity on me at last," cried the delighted host. "My luck has begun to turn."

XXXVI

HAPPY JACK IS SURPRISED

"**Y**OU don't seem to like the idea of my going to the States this winter, after all," said Captain Ranger to his partner, who had been for several days exhibiting a degree of ill temper not assuring to a man of peaceful inclinations.

"Not by a darn sight. Business is business. Them weemen folks o' yourn is as independent as so many hogs on ice. They are goin' back on me about the cookin' for the men. But say! I won't object to your goin' no more, if you'll make Jean marry me afore you start. I could manage her all right if she was my wife; an' then I could set the pace for the rest of 'em."

The Captain paused a moment, in doubt whether to give the fellow the toe of his boot or wipe the ground with his whole body. "My daughters are to be their own choosers," he said. "I have already engaged a crew of loggers to work while I am absent. If the winter is open, we can have everything shipshape by the time the machinery arrives."

"Stay, daddie," cried Jean, who, with Mary, had come up unobserved by their father. She was ghastly pale and strangely tremulous. "Mame and I have something important to say to you both before you part."

"What is it, gals? Don't hesitate to speak right out."

"We — that is, Jean and I and Sally O'Dowd — have been talking things over; and we have concluded that we had better settle our side of this business proposition before matters go any further," said Mary, speaking with unusual decision. "As you, father, have arranged to have a partner, and as — to use his own words — 'business is business,' I want to say that I will be your cook at the partnership mess-house, but only at a reasonable salary. If you had no partner, the work would be all in the family, and we could settle its dividend among ourselves."

"I have engaged a dozen pupils and will open a little school in a few days," interrupted Jean, who had not heard the partner's proposition in regard to herself, and therefore spoke without embarrassment. "But I shall have plenty of time to keep the books of the concern after school hours, and I will see that everything is done on business principles."

"The deuce you will!" thought the partner. Then aloud: "I was intendin' to keep the books myself."

"Are you a practical book-keeper?" asked Jean.

"No; that is, not edzactly. But I kin keep most any set o' transactions in my head. I never in my born days hearn tell of any woman or gal that could keep books. An' I never knowed any woman to git a salary."

"That was because you never knew the Ranger family," laughed Marjorie.

"It is arranged that Hal is to have employment in the mill at a salary," said Mary, "and he is very proud of the opportunity. We girls are all as willing to work as he is. But we do not believe at all in the custom of servitude without salary, to which all married women, and most of the single ones, are subject."

"Is that the way you look at it, Miss Jean?" asked her would-be suitor.

"Daddie has always taught us that the highest type

of humanity is built on the self-dependence of the individual. Have n't you, daddie?"

"My daughters are right, Mr. Jackman. I have trained them to the idea of self-government. I am glad indeed to see them taking hold of these principles firmly."

The partner turned away crestfallen. When he was fairly out of hearing, he took off his hat and exclaimed: "I'll be gol darned! What is the weemin comin' to?"

"I have engaged Susannah to live at my house," said the Little Doctor, addressing the Captain as he sauntered toward a spreading fir near the front doorsteps, where the family were holding a consultation with Mrs. Joseph Ranger prior to her departure.

"Then who will assist Mrs. O'Dowd while I am away?" asked the Captain. "She'll surely need both company and assistance at the Ranch of the Whispering Firs as badly as you will need it at the Four Corners."

"Don't worry about me, Captain," said Sally. "I can manage the whole place without the help of anybody."

"Thank you, Mrs. O'Dowd. You are a thoroughly unselfish woman."

"Pardon me, daddie," said Jean, as soon as she could address him privately. "You make a great mistake if you imagine Sally O'Dowd is n't as selfish as the rest of us. The Little Doctor was quite taken aback by a remark to the contrary that you made a while ago."

"I'm sure I meant no offence, Jean. But I confess that I am disappointed in both the Little Doctor and Susannah. They ought not to leave me in an extremity like the present when I have been so kind to them."

"Everything we attempt is actuated by selfishness, daddie."

"I can't agree with you, Jean."

"Oh, yes, you can! You took the Little Doctor under your wing away back in the States, because you could only hope by that means to get some help that you

needed out o' Scotty. You smuggled Dugs out o' Missouri because it pleased you to please your wife. I am going to teach a little school from a purely selfish motive."

"Was it selfishness that prompted you to fall in love with your unfaithful Green River hero, Jean?"

She turned deathly pale. "Yes, daddie dear. I thought I was going to be happy; and that was selfishness, of course. But I'm getting my punishment."

"If selfishness is a natural attribute of humanity, we ought not to decry it, but should seek to control and guide it, Jean."

"That is right, daddie. We have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But we also need toughening. I am getting my share of toughening."

"Do you object to my marrying Sally O'Dowd?"

"That is your affair, daddie; but there is no accounting for tastes."

"Do you think your angel-mother would approve the step, my child?"

"Ah!" cried Jean, her face brightening, "there is one love that never dies, — the love of a mother for her child. It is the same sort of unselfish love that prompted the Son of Man to lay down His life for the redemption of the race; it is the same love that prompted my mother to risk and lose her life in the wilderness. You will please yourself by marrying Sally O'Dowd. We children will pay her allegiance as our father's wife, chiefly because we know on which side our bread is buttered. But we will not call her mother; nor do we believe you would ask it."

"I could n't think of taking the step, my child, unless I thought your mother would approve it, if she could know. But I am very sure she does n't know."

"You do not want to believe she knows, daddie. It is always easier to believe or disbelieve anything when the wish is father to the thought."

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"Well, Jean, it will not do to be loitering here. Yonder come the logging crew. There'll be a lot of hungry men to feed. Some of them are educated men, quite equal in intelligence and culture to Mr. Burns. Don't go to losing your heart."

"Don't speak of hearts to me, daddie dear; mine is dead and buried. But you have no idea how cruelly it was wrung."

"There, there, daughter, don't worry! There are as good fish in the sea as any that have ever been caught."

There was no time for loitering. There was an extra lodge to be built in the wilderness for the crew of loggers, and a long dining-shed to be added; the rails had to be made and fences built; the ground had to be cleared and broken for the spring's planting; and much rude furniture for the homes had yet to be manufactured. The building of a skid road was another pressing need; and, taken all together, the Captain did not wonder that his partner should take his departure seriously.

That the partner was not lacking in executive ability was evident.

"I tell you, gals, that partner of mine is a corker for business," said the Captain.

"He may be, daddie," said Jean, "but that is all he's good for. If there's a chance to murder the Queen's English, he'll do it. He afflicts me with nausea whenever he speaks."

"But if you had a man like him for a husband, you would never lack means for the indulgence of the selfish philanthropies you and I have been talking about. You know you promised your grandfather that you would assist him as soon as you could earn some money."

"That's so, daddie; but I must earn it honestly. And I'd be getting it through the worst kind of fraudulent practice if I married Happy Jack. Besides, he will be too stingy for anything after he's married."

"Don't be too hard on him, Jean. He's got good credentials."

"And so had Sam O'Dowd. No, daddie, I won't have any money unless I can get it honestly. As soon as I can earn some cash by teaching, I'll send it to the dear old grandfolks. They capped the climax of their selfishness in jeopardizing the property and happiness of all concerned to gratify their selfish pride in Uncle Joe."

"Your theories and practices don't tally, Jean," laughed her father as he turned, and, with a tender good-bye aside for Sally O'Dowd and an open and hearty adieu to the children, he seated himself in the buggy beside his sister-in-law and drove rapidly away.

"I wonder how many years must elapse before the roads to Portland are as snugly finished and kept in as good repair as they are to-day from one suburb of London town to another?" asked Mrs. Joseph, merely to break an embarrassing silence.

"In another fifty years the people'll be awake to the need, mebbe. It takes a hundred years to make a new country habitable."

"My people always want their hunting-grounds to remain wild," said Mrs. Joseph. "I used to like the most primitive modes of life in my childhood; but I learned a better way in London."

"Did you learn to like the Indian life again, Wah-netta?"

"Never, sir. But I stooped to conquer, and I have succeeded. But I never could have done the best that was in me, for myself and Joseph, to say nothing of the children, if my father had n't made me, instead of my husband, his legatee. It takes money to do things."

XXXVII

NEWS FOR JEAN

THE second meeting between the Ranger brothers was much more embarrassing than cordial. Each at sight of the other recalled their last encounter. They shook hands hesitatingly, and after an awkward pause sat down together on the front porch of the primitive hotel.

Joseph, who had been awaiting the arrival of his wife and the Captain for a couple of days, was displeased because his Wahnetta had not been within call from the moment of his advent, as long habit had led him to expect. That she met him now with the air of a friend and an equal, and after a pleasant greeting on her part discreetly left the brothers to themselves while she went in quest of her babies, was a display of good breeding and motherly solicitude which Joseph Ranger would have commended in any woman not his wife. But his will had so long been her only law that her greeting, in connection with his embarrassment at meeting his brother, put him in a very unamiable frame of mind.

"I concluded that you had gone back on your agreement, John," he growled, after a painful silence.

"Oh, did you? Since when have you made a new record for punctuality, Joe?"

"Since the arrival of the last courier at the trading-post, who brought me your letter."

"What did you think of my proposition?"

"I accepted it at once, or I would not have been here. Who is Wahnetta going out driving with, I wonder?"

"I called the cab for a drive with the children a little before you came, sir," said the nurse.

"Oh!"

"You ought to be very proud of your wife, Joe."

"I am beginning to be. Yet you never can tell what the Indian nature will attempt. She seems to be all right when she lives with white people, but she 'd lapse at once into barbarism again if she got a chance. They all do it. It is in the blood."

"She does n't seems to want that sort of a chance, Joe."

"An Indian is like a wild coyote, John."

"But you have caught a tame one, Joe. She is above the average, even of white women. Give her the chance she craves. Stand by her like a gentleman. She is as thoroughly civilized as any of us."

"Did you see her at the trading-post last summer?"

"No; but why do you ask?"

"Because you would have beheld her in her native element. You may capture and tame a coyoté, but when you turn him loose among his natural environments, you can't distinguish him in a short time from the wildest wolf of the pack."

"That being the case, there is strong need for keeping your wife in her adopted home, among your own people."

John was thawing toward his brother at a rapid rate; and Joseph, the erring but encouraged and repenting brother, felt a pang of remorse as he arose to welcome his wife and children upon their return from their drive, resolving in his heart that he would never again allow himself to regret the vows he had taken upon himself in his early manhood.

The paper was awaiting the Captain at his table the next morning, with the announcement that the sailing of the ocean steamer was to be delayed for a couple of days on account of an accident to her propeller.

"Then we'll have time for a spin out to the Ranch of the Whispering Firs, eh, Joe?" he asked, as his brother, accompanied by Wahnetta, who was resplendent in a crimson cashmere robe, over which her black

mantilla was carelessly thrown, took his seat at his elbow at breakfast.

"I thought I'd like to take a spin through this embryo city," was the quiet response.

"But I want you to see the lay of the land. I'm hoping to make you a partner in the ranch and sawmill business. You won't want to buy a pig in a poke."

A visit to Joseph's sons and daughters at school was first in order. Then a carriage was called, and the entire party was conducted around and over stumps, logs, and devious primitive roadways to the heights.

"Why anybody wants to go to the Old World for scenery, when he can enjoy such a prospect as this right at his very door, is one of the mysteries of modern existence," said Wahnetta. "Away to the north by east of us, in the home of my people, there is a land so different from this that it might be a part of another planet, yet it is passing beautiful. Directly to the north is the traditional Whulge, or Puget Sound, where the enemies of my people live, who, like my own, are dying out. This mighty land is a giant baby; wait half a century, and she will be a full-grown giantess."

It was three o'clock when they returned to the hotel, but a fresh team from the one livery stable the metropolis of Oregon Territory was able to boast was placed at the disposal of the brothers, who spanned a distance of thirty miles in three hours. A light rain had fallen in the early morning, and the face of Nature was as pure as ether. Resplendent green abounded in the valley, lighted here and there by gleams of the gliding Willamette, on whose silvery current little white steamers were seen at intervals, flitting to and fro like swans. In many spots in the valley, and everywhere on the mountain-sides, stood rows on rows of forest firs, and beyond these, coming frequently into view as the road wound in and out among the trees, arose the snow-crowned monarch of the Cascades, majestic Mount Hood, whose slowly dying glaciers

discharged their silt into the milk-white waters of the Sandy.

"What do you think of it all?" asked the elder brother, after a long silence, in which each had been feasting his eyes upon the beauty of the scene and filling his lungs with the exhilarating air.

"I'm thinking of the glories that await the later comers into this beautiful land, after the pioneers have worn their bodies out in their struggles with the native wilderness. I've been shutting my eyes and seeing coal mines, iron mines, gold mines, oil mines, silver mines, farms, fisheries, mills, factories, orchards, gardens, everything! I've lived in Utah and witnessed the marvels of irrigation there; but God does the irrigating in this country, and He does it well."

"Did you see the fishes that swarmed in the Sandy, Joe?"

"Yes; and I've seen salmon and sturgeon struggling up the Columbia, so thick in the current that they looked like Illinois saw-logs. I think I know how Moses felt when he had

"Climbed to Pisgah's top,
And viewed the landscape o'er."

"Wait till we reach the Ranch of the Whispering Firs. Then you will see something worthy of all your rhapsodies. There!" cried the Captain, as they sighted the broad and slightly sloping plateau on which his new log house was built.

In front of it stood a towering fir-tree, like an ever-vigilant sentinel; and behind it rose gigantic colonnades of evergreen forests. Foaming waters surged and leaped through a ragged gulch; and tangled thickets of hazel, alder, dogwood, and elder crowded the luxurious growth of ferns that struggled for the mastery. "There!" he repeated, "what do you think now?"

"That I'd like to transport the entire family of Rang-

ers, root and branch, to the Ranch of the Whispering Firs. Suppose we take your old sawmill off Lije's hands and remove the whole thing to Oregon, John? It would be a good way to relieve him of his elephant."

"The machinery is old and old-fashioned, Joe. We'd better buy everything new, and the best of its kind."

"I was merely thinking of relieving Lije; that's all."

As they made the last turn leading to the house, they were accosted impatiently by the Captain's junior partner.

"At this rate, you won't git started to the States afore Christmas, Cap'n."

"This is my brother Joseph, Mr. Jackman. And this, Joseph, is my partner, Mr. Jackman."

The two men glared at each other for a moment in silence. Jackman was the first to speak, —

"Well, I'm dummed!"

"How came you to be known as Jackman? You posed as Hankins in Utah."

"An' you was Joe Addicks, pard. Better not tell tales out o' school. That's a game two can play at."

"There are no tales to tell on my part. I am masquerading no more. Can you say as much?"

"I'm just a-beginnin', as it were."

"How in the name of Fate did you come across that chap, John?" asked Joseph, as they alighted from the buggy.

"He has taken a donation claim on the mountain-side which includes the water-power for our mill site. At least, he says it does. Burns and I have n't had time to survey it yet."

"Better go slow with that fellow, John."

"What do you know about him, Joe?"

"Nothing; only he's been a noted crook and jail-breaker."

"Jean is to be our book-keeper. She's been disappointed over that Green River affair. Do you know what became of Ashleigh?"

"I left him at my station in charge of my business. He's as honest as the day. But, by the way, why did n't Jean answer the letter he sent out in care of your Happy Jack?"

"She received no letter. But what about Le-Le? Did he marry her?"

"Did Ashleigh marry Le-Le? What a question! Who said he did?"

"Jackman."

"Jean must know of all this. Will you break it to her, Joe?"

Night had come; and the autumn rains were gently enwrapping the Ranch of the Whispering Firs in a sheet of mist when Joseph Ranger sought Jean in her little school-room for a private conversation.

The flickering light of a single kerosene lamp emitted a characteristic odor. A rough table supported the lamp; and on a three-legged stool sat the schoolma'am, trying to bring order out of the chaos of a score or more of papers left by the children.

"Ah!" she said, arising. "Come in, Uncle Joe. You won't find our crude beginnings very inviting, but we must n't despise the day of small things."

"You're making a good beginning, Jean. But I have not come to talk about your school. I have brought you some tidings from Mr. Ashleigh."

Jean turned pale and would have fallen if her uncle had not caught her in his arms.

"Here is a note which he gave me just as I was leaving for the West."

Jean retained her composure by a supreme effort of the will.

"You were my dream," the letter began; "I trusted and loved you as I can never trust and love another. And the end is to be your marriage with a fellow you call Happy Jack! Oh, Jean, my bonnie Jean! Why have

you been so fickle and so rash? I sent you a letter and a ring. It was my great-great-grandmother's ring, and a hereditary talisman. The messenger was one Harry Hankins, a borderer and scout, who was going to Oregon City. No, Jean; I did not marry Le-Le, but I did secure her ransom, and I should before now have been on my way to you, but was awaiting your letter. Good-bye, and may God guard and keep you! Think of me as your heartbroken friend and lover."

"I never received one single word from him," said Jean; "and I never saw or heard of Harry Hankins."

"Oh, yes, you did, Jean. He is none other than your father's partner."

"How can I reach Mr. Ashleigh with a letter? It must be sent at once."

"That will be impossible, Jean; there will be no courier going out for a month yet. But we will take a letter to Portland, and leave it in care of Wahnetta. She will see that it is forwarded at the first opportunity."

- Busily the work went forward. But Happy Jack was nowhere to be seen, and the brothers were compelled to take their departure without making the business settlement with him which they so much desired.

"Never mind! We'll freeze him out, or scare him out, if he shows up here again," said the Captain, as he and his brother turned their faces Portland-ward.

XXXVIII

*THE BROTHERS JOURNEY HOMEWARD
TOGETHER*

THE steamer in which the Ranger brothers embarked for San Francisco was an ancient and somewhat decrepit tub, as much unlike the floating palaces that plough the Pacific Ocean to-day as the long railway trains with their Pullman coaches, cushioned seats, and electric bells are unlike the prairie schooners which belabored oxen hauled across deserts and mountains when the oldest pioneer of to-day was young, and Captain Ranger was in his prime.

"We're at the jumping-off place," said the elder brother, when the vessel stopped at Astoria. "There will never be a chance for the restive American citizen to get any farther west than the eastern edge of the Pacific Ocean. And yet who knows?" he added, after a pause. "Burns has a theory in which, after all, there may be some logic. He says that the entire planet will some day be under the management of an affiliated government formed by a few great powers, who will organize an alliance to control, and maybe protect, the weaker nationalities from one another. Jean is enthusiastic over the theme."

"You seem to set great store by Jean."

"Oh, I don't know. She's about raking up a new engagement with that Green River chap. If she does, she'll marry soon, and get immersed in the cares of a family, like all the rest of the girls. If so, she'll never amount to much."

"No great general can do as much for the world, no matter how many nations he conquers, as the mother

who rears a family of noble men and women, John. I would rather be in some mothers' shoes than in the President's."

"And so would I. But it is hard, when a man has raised a daughter of great mental promise, to see her talents buried under the selfish domination of some prig of a husband who has all the power though he has n't half her sense."

"Wait long enough," said John, as they passed Tillamook Head and pursued their undulating way southward; "wait long enough, and the genius of American liberty and enterprise will settle yonder shores with a million or more inhabitants. Railroads by the dozen will cross the continent in time, sending out lateral branches in all directions, till the whole country is gridironed with paths for the iron horse."

"But the mountains are in the way, John."

"They will be tunnelled or looped, Joe. New feats of engineering are being developed constantly; and I should not be surprised to hear of the discovery of some new force, or rather of the discovery of the utility of some always existing force, which will revolutionize transportation on the land and the sea. There are islands to the west of us, lots of them. And who knows but they will become a part of the possessions of the United States before the close of the century? I'd like to have Burns and Jean and the Little Doctor here to help me talk it out."

"I can't let my mind get away from me, as you do," laughed Joseph, and they changed the subject.

Days passed, and the timber lines of southern Oregon and northern California gave way to the extensive treeless regions that border the central and southern edges of the Golden State. Immense stretches of barren, sandy wastes rose high in the arid heavens, revealing a region

of desolation that seemed good for nothing but range for savage beasts and poisonous serpents.

"It is now my turn to prophesy and philosophize," said Joseph. "My experience and observation in Utah, where irrigation has relieved the barren soil of its drouth, has taught me that irrigation will develop the latent power of the desert to sustain and perpetuate the race long after the Mississippi basin has ceased to respond to the demands of the husbandman and the vernal lands of the Willamette valley are worn out."

"But the Willamette valley and the entire northwest coast will always beat the world with the fruits and cereals that thrive in the temperate zone."

"'Always' is a good while, John. It is a pity that we can't live always."

"Jean declares that we do."

"How came she to know so much?"

"I cannot tell; but she has evolved a theory from her studies and conclusions that seems plausible. At any rate, we cannot disprove it; and as it comforts her and hurts nobody, I am glad she can enjoy it. But the gong has sounded for dinner, and I am as hungry as a bear."

"It is a glorious thing to be alive," exclaimed the Captain, when they spied the lights of the Farallones to the leeward, while on their left rose Mare Island; and they knew that they were nearing the Golden Gate. Four days of happy, languorous idleness on a glassy sea had been theirs to enjoy. But each decided that he had had enough of leisure, and was glad when Telegraph Hill, the towering head of the city of San Francisco, was seen among its myriads of sand-dunes and rioting patches of native weeds.

"It is indeed a glorious thing to be alive!" said Joseph, as they were being jostled in the streets of the city, where a babel of tongues kept up a continuous clatter, as bewildering as it was unintelligible,

The hotel in which the brothers found lodgings was a little superior to the Portland hostelry, being larger; but the food was far from satisfactory, and they found the sand-fleas and Benicia Bay mosquitoes more voracious than welcome. The sights of the truly cosmopolitan city were new and alluring; and once, but for the intervention of the police, the verdant pair would have been fleeced by a smooth-tongued swindler. They were directed by a big policeman to an immense hardware establishment, where they found a complete up-to-date outfit for their plant. They then continued their journey toward the Isthmus with a feeling of anticipation to which their frequent conversations concerning the legendary lore of the peculiar country for which they were bound possessed a fascinating interest.

"I have read of a lost continent, which is said to have existed in a prehistoric age," said the younger brother. "The Indians of the Mandan district have many legends in regard to it. They say the Great Spirit submerged the dry land in a fit of anger, thus separating the so-called Old World from the so-called New, and driving the remnant of the surviving inhabitants to the north as far as the Great Lakes, where they speedily relapsed into the barbarism that ensues from isolation, hardships, and necessity, until at last they perished from the face of the earth."

"But what of the origin of the Indian race?" asked John.

"Their legends tell us that their ancestors came originally from Russia, by the way of Behring Strait, which in winter was closed by ice; that at one time the ice gorges were suddenly broken up by a tremendous gale and were never closed again. There were natives of the great Northland who were caught on the south side of the gorge, and, being unable to return, remained in what is now Alaska, whence they migrated, multiplied, and spread till they covered what is now the United States of America."

"When we return to Oregon, you must not fail to start Burns on some of these legends, Joe. The Widow McAlpin, whom he means to marry as soon as she will consent, is as deeply interested in the origin of the Indians as he is."

"But if we knew all about the immediate origin of the Indians, that would n't settle the question, John. Where did the Russians get their start; and how did every island of the great oceans become inhabited?"

"You are carrying me away beyond my depth, Joe. Burns has a theory that different races of people are indigenous to all countries. He calls the story of Adam and Eve a myth, or a sort of cabalistic tale. That reminds me that Jean once completely nonplussed the Reverend Thomas Rogers by asking who were the daughters of men whom the sons of God took as wives. 'And where,' she asked, 'did Cain get his wife?'"

"These speculations, which are by no means new, are as fruitless as they are perplexing, John. We know no more about them than these donkeys do that are floundering, with us on their backs, across this God-forsaken Isthmus. Will there ever be a canal cut across it, I wonder?"

"Guess we'd better talk about spring. That is something we can understand."

"No, John. We can no more clearly comprehend the springtime, with its many wondrous revelations, than we can comprehend anything else that is unknowable. We know that sunshine, air, and moisture are necessary for the sustenance of organic life; but we don't know what life itself is. It is as invisible to us, in all its wonderful activities, as God himself. No; we know no more about the life that animates spring than we know about the Atlantans. But we do know that travel is a great eye-opener; and by showing us how little we know, or can learn, it helps to take away much of our overweening self-conceit."

There being no delay at Acapulco, and but little at New Orleans, our voyagers were soon aboard one of the palatial steamers that ploughed the waters of the Mississippi in the days when steamboating on the river was in the height of its glory. Floating palaces, with hearts of fire and arteries of steam, were equipped in the most sumptuous style. The cuisine of their tables was never excelled in any land. Trained servants were on duty at every hand in all departments, and such river races as the pen of Mark Twain has made immortal infused an alluring element of danger into the daily life of the adventurous traveller.

St. Louis was passed, and Cairo; and the voyage up the Illinois to Peoria was speedily consummated.

The brothers struck out afoot for the old home, which they came into sight of at sundown. A light snow covered the ground, and a bitter wind was blowing hard.

"Down, Rover, down! Don't you know your master?" exclaimed the returned wanderer, as the great mastiff sprang at him with a low, savage growl, which changed at once to vehement proclamations of welcome as the faithful creature recognized his friend.

"Bless the dog! But be quiet! We want to surprise the old folks."

In the cosy sitting-room of the little cottage sat a prematurely aged woman, plying her needle and softly crooning a plaintive lullaby. A couple of tallow candles burned dimly on a little table, and a much-worn work-basket sat at her left. In the opposite corner an old man sat, his head bowed, as if sleeping. An open Bible had fallen from his hand.

"There's but one pair of stockings to mend to-night," sighed the woman, as she folded her finished work, her thoughts reverting to scenes long vanished.

The white-bearded man aroused himself at her words and spoke.

"John is forty-three to-night," he said huskily, his finger pointing to the family record.

"God be with him till we meet again!" was the sighing response as the mother struggled to thread her needle by the flickering light.

"Mary is a year younger than John; and Joseph came to us two years later than Mary," said the patriarch, his finger still pointing to the cherished page.

"Oh, father!" cried the wife, "do you think I shall ever hold my Joseph in my arms again?"

"God knows best," was the sad reply.

A cat purred contentedly at the woman's feet, and crickets sang upon the hearth. Outside, the wind sighed dolefully.

"Wonder what's the matter with Rover?" said the old man, rising to his feet, after repeated efforts, and hobbling toward the door. "He's acting strangely to-night."

"Don't open the door, father," pleaded the wife. "The whole country is infested with tramps and robbers. We'd better be cautious. I'm sure I saw faces at the window a while ago."

"Rover knows what he's about, wife. He never speaks like that to an enemy. I will open the door."

It seemed to the men outside that the door was long in opening. "My fingers are all thumbs!" they heard the old man exclaim, after a fruitless effort to withdraw the bolt.

"Good-evening!" exclaimed Joseph, in a husky voice. "We are a pair of belated travellers, and seek a night's lodging. Can we be accommodated?"

"We're not used to keeping travellers," said the patriarch, "but it is late, and another storm is brewing. Come right in. Wife can fix you a shake-down somewhere, I reckon; and we always have a bite on hand to eat."

"We have two sons of our own out in the world some-

where, father," said the wife. "I will trust the Lord to do by them as we will do by these strangers."

John Ranger threw back his heavy coat and hat and stood before the pair erect and motionless.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, after a moment's waiting, as he caught her in his arms, "don't you know your boy?"

"Why, bless my soul, it's our John, — my firstborn baby boy!" faltered the mother, as she resigned herself to his realistic "bear hug." "I thought you was in Oregon."

"So I was a few weeks ago; but I am here now! How are you, mother dear? And you, father? I am so glad to see you again! How goes the world with both of you?"

"All right, son, considering. That is, it's all right now you are here. We can bear poverty and hardship now. Eh, wife?"

"Yes, father. If the Lord sees fit to afflict us, we can now bear it without complaining. Blessed be His holy name! But how did it happen, John dear? I was thinking about you to-night as being far away on this, your forty-third birthday."

"We do things in a hurry on the Pacific coast, mother mine. This is an unexpected visit. But you are neglecting somebody."

"That is so," exclaimed the old man. "What might your name be, stranger?"

The tall man in the shadow took a faltering step forward and removed his hat.

"Don't you know me, father?"

"Good God! Can it be possible that this is Joseph?"

"Don't let him deceive us, John!" pleaded the mother. "I could n't live and bear it!"

"Yes, mother dear, it is indeed your Joseph, — your long-lost son," cried the prodigal. "Don't you recognize me now?"

John, who had released his mother, stood by in silence; while Joseph, secure in his welcome, gathered his mother in his arms and exclaimed, "It is now my turn to give you a bear hug. Take this, and this!" and he clasped her with half-savage tenderness again and again.

"Yes, mother!" cried the father, who, overcome by his emotions, dropped feebly into his chair. Then, controlling his feelings by a strong effort of the will, he added with a laugh, "Had n't we better kill the prodigal, seeing the calf has come home?"

At a late hour a frugal meal was spread, to which the weary home-comers did enforced justice, the mother on one side of the table weeping and laughing by turns, and the father on the other side endeavoring with indifferent success to be dignified and calm.

The brothers eyed each other askance as the supper proceeded, especially noticing the absence of the many little luxuries for which the Ranger tables had formerly been noted throughout the township.

"Father and I don't have much appetite, so we don't lay in many extras nowadays," said the mother.

"We've been having a hard time of it since you left us, John," broke in the father. "The fellow that bought the sawmill did n't understand the business, and he soon swamped it. So Lije had to take it off his hands, and it left us mighty hard up. Lije has a big family, and the gals want clothes and schoolin', and Mary is poorly and needs medicines; so mother and I do without lots of things we need. It was lucky for all hands, though, that Annie sent back that deed to the Robinson old folks. They're independent now, in a small way. They have their own garden and cow and fruit and poultry, and they made enough off of their truck-patch last summer to pay their taxes and buy groceries. They don't need many new clothes. They have bought a sleigh and a horse, so they can go to meetin' Sundays; and next

summer, Daddie Robinson says, he'll be able to buy a buggy."

"I meant to let you have that little place, father," said John, trying in vain to eat his food. "But Annie claimed it as her own; and Mary and Jean insisted that she had a right to deed it to her own parents. If you had such a little home now, could you be contented?"

"Oh, John," cried his mother, "if we only had a place as good! I never covet what is my neighbor's, but I do want to be independent."

"Can't you pack your little effects and go with us to Oregon?" asked Joseph, a great lump rising in his throat.

The old man looked anxiously at his wife. The wife looked inquiringly at her husband.

"It will be just as father says," said the wife, submissively.

"An old man is like an old tree," began the father, bowing his head upon the table. "You can transplant a man or a tree, but you can't make 'em take root to do much good in new soil after they get old. With the young it's different. It's out o' sight, out o' mind, with them. They can take root anywhere if the conditions are favorable and they want to change."

"That's right, father," echoed the wife. "We're too old to make a new start in a new country. Besides, the expense of transplanting us to so great a distance would go a long way toward taking care of us nearer home. I'd like it mighty well if we could live near all our children in our old days; but if it is better for them, — and I reckon it is, — the sacrifices we must make to bear the separation must n't count. We ought to be used to privation and poverty by this time."

"We have all heard of the Irishman's way of feeding, or not feeding, his horse!" exclaimed Joseph. "The plan seemed successful for a few days, but just when the animal was supposed to be used to the treatment, the ungrateful creature died."

"I could keep the wolf from the door a few years longer if it was n't for my rheumatism," said the father. "The after-clap of old hardships gets the better of me now and then. I'm only able, much of the time, to potter round the place and help your mother at odd jobs. I reckon she would miss me if I should be called away, however."

"God grant that we may be called away together when we are wanted in the land o' the leal," said the good wife, fervently; and her husband responded with a hearty "Amen."

"You are not to be allowed to worry any more!" exclaimed Joseph, rising to his feet and straightening himself to his full height. "I am not rich, but I am amply able to place you above want; and, so help me God, I'll do it. I've been the stray sheep. I've wandered far from the fold, and I've been a long time coming to my senses. But I have put the past behind me, and, come what will, my dear father and mother shall be provided for during the remainder of their lives."

"But you have a family, my son. Don't make any promises that will interfere with your obligations to your wife and children."

"I have some gold mines in Utah, mother dear, and an interest in several trading-posts on the frontier. I will never neglect you again."

"Jean went away under a promise to assist us as soon as she could earn some money of her own," said the father; "but we can look for no help from that quarter for some time to come. It is n't right to expect it of her, either. Oh, boys, if you could only know how it has stung us to be treated as mendicants, after we have worn ourselves out in the service of our children, you would appreciate our joy over this cheering news!"

"Who is treating you as mendicants, mother, I should like to know?" exclaimed the elder son. "Did n't I leave you provided for when I started for Oregon?"

"You did your best to make provision for our needs, my son. We are blaming nobody. Don't allow yourself to feel unhappy. We are not complaining of anything but Fate."

"But you ought to blame me," cried Joseph. "It was I who brought all these calamities upon my nearest and dearest. But God knows I do repent in sackcloth and ashes."

"Oh, father, we can never be unhappy now! Our boy that was lost is found. He that we mourned as dead is with us, alive and well. There is no blood-guiltiness upon his head, and no shadow of murder or hatred in his heart. The Lord be praised for all His tender mercies to the children of men!"

"Yes, yes, the Lord be praised!" echoed the father, fervently. "Surely, after all the blessings that have been showered upon us this night, we can take all the balance on trust."

"We have the promise, father: 'Trust in the Lord and do good, and verily thou shalt be fed.'"

"I'd give the world, if I had it, for the simple, child-like faith of our father and mother," said John, as soon as the brothers were alone.

"And I'd give the world, if I had it, for a chance to live my life over, that I might have an opportunity to atone for the suffering I have caused you all."

"Dear Joe, you have suffered too."

He turned his face to the wall and relapsed into silence. And as he secretly invoked the presence of his beloved dead, he saw himself in an emigrant's camp far away in the Black Hills. Again the tethered Flossie lowed plaintively at the wagon-wheel, bemoaning the death of her calf; again the still, white-robed form of his Annie appeared before his mental vision. And the sorrowing husband fell asleep.

XXXIX

THE OLD HOMESTEAD

THE gray dawn of a bleak December morning found the Ranger brothers alternately stamping the snow from their feet on the front veranda of the old homestead, and listening for the first sounds of awakening within. The same denuded locust-boughs swept the lattice as of yore; and it seemed but yesterday to John Ranger as he recalled the time he had caught his gentle Annie in his arms on that momentous and well-remembered evening, and made the startling announcement, "It's all settled, mother. Brother Lije has bought the farm, and we'll be off in less than a month for Oregon."

He turned to his brother, whose face was like marble as he stood in the shadow of the wall, as silent as the Sphinx.

"Who in thunder is coming here to rout a fellow out o' bed at this time of a Sunday morning?" growled Lije Robinson, as he opened the door an inch or so and peeped out into the biting air.

"It is I and another," cried John Ranger, pushing the door wide open. For a moment the brothers-in-law faced each other in silence. One was dumb with many conflicting emotions, the other with simple wonder.

"Your conscience must have troubled you," said Lije, after an awkward pause, "or you would n't have come back. But come in! I'll start up the fire. Who's this?" looking hard at Joseph, whose bronzed and bearded face was more than half concealed by the upturned collar of his fur-lined overcoat.

"Don't you know him, Lije?"

"Naw, nor I don't want to."

Meanwhile Mrs. Robinson had emerged from her room after a hurried toilet.

"Sister Mollie!"

"Brother John!"

For half a minute not another word was spoken.

"I never expected to set eyes on you again," cried the sister at last, as, half crying and half laughing, she held him at arm's length for a better view. "It seemed as if you had left the world when you went to Oregon; and now you are back again, — the same old John."

"This is an age of progress, Mollie. The planet does n't seem so very big, if you know how to get around it."

"Will you introduce the stranger, John?" asked his sister, in a welcoming tone.

"I've been waiting to see if he would be recognized. There is another surprise in store for you, Mollie. Did you ever see this man before?"

"Can it be possible," she asked, her face deathly pale, "that this is my brother Joseph?"

"Yes, Mollie," he cried, as he caught her in his arms, "I'm your long-lost brother."

"Then I hope you've come prepared to pay your honest debts," growled the brother-in-law. "I've wrestled with that old mortgage till I'm demnition tired!"

"I hope you'll permit me to atone as best I can, Lije. That's what I'm here for."

"Don't be too hard on him, Lije!" pleaded the sister, as she helped the prodigal to remove his overcoat. "You're all right now, brother, are n't you?"

"I will be as soon as I have settled some old scores with your bear of a husband."

"Don't mind Lije!" said his sister, aside. "His losses and obligations have made him discouraged and cross. It was n't natural that he should endure our hardships resignedly, as we did. Blood is thicker than

water, you know. Oh, Joseph, if I only could buy for our parents a nice little farm, such as Annie deeded to her father and mother! There's a ten-acre farm adjoining theirs; I cannot sleep for thinking about it. But my whole lifework has been devoted to Lije, and must count for nothing, so far as father and mother are concerned. Father gave me a cow and calf for a wedding present, as you will remember. They would have made me comfortable long ago if I could have kept them and one-half of their increase as mine."

"Yes, Mollie; and I acted the brute beast over that gift. I was a bumptious boy then; and I encouraged Lije in the idea that he must n't allow his wife to own property. I waxed eloquent, as I thought, over coverture, and such other archaic injustice as merges the existence of a wife into that of her husband. Men are more appreciative of women on the Pacific coast than they are here; but there are laws and usages out there yet that call loudly for a change, the Lord knows."

"I am not complaining of Lije, Joe. He has never offered me any bodily injury in his life, and I've learned not to mind the explosions from his mouth. I have everything I need for my own simple wants; but, no matter how hard I struggle, I can never help my parents to a penny unless I steal it"; and she laid her head on her brother's shoulder and sobbed aloud.

"What's the matter now?" growled her husband. "Can't you stop your bawling when you have company?"

"Breakfast is ready," said Annie Robinson, a tall and handsome girl, who had been busy in the lean-to kitchen.

"Annie, this is Uncle Joseph," said her mother, smiling through her tears.

"I don't want to see him," retorted the girl, rudely, turning to Uncle John with extended hands and a smile of welcome, and saying in a half-whisper, "What did you bring him here for?"

"The hair of the dog is good for the bite sometimes, my girl. Your Uncle Joseph is all right. He'll atone for everything if we'll give him half a chance."

"You owe Joseph an apology for your rudeness, Annie; I am surprised at you!" said her mother. Then, turning to Joseph: "Don't mind Annie. She is unhappy and cross because she could not go to boarding-school this winter."

"If I did n't deserve what I'm getting I would n't stand it, sister; but I've come to atone, and I must take my punishment."

The room was severely cold, and the hot breakfast filled the air with a vapor that obscured the window-panes. The lighted candles, in their tall receivers, reflected translucent halos, and lit the lithe figure of Annie Robinson, who flitted silently between the table and the great black stove, serving the food, and looking like a weird, uncanny shade.

"The way of the transgressor is hard," thought Joseph. "We must be ready to take the back track to-morrow, John," he said, rising from his chair, and leaving his food almost untasted. "Whatever business you and Lije may have between you must be agreed upon to-day. Where can I hire a horse and sleigh?"

"I've a cutter in the barn," said Lije, beginning to relax a little as his breakfast stirred his heart and warmed his spirits. "You'll find half-a-dozen old sawmill horses in the big shed back of the barn. They're spavined and ringboned, and one of 'em is knock-kneed; but you can take your pick of the lot."

"Won't you let me go along, Joe?" asked his brother, as they left the house together. "Where are you going, anyhow?"

"Of course you can go along if you are not needed here. I am going to see about buying that ten-acre tract that Mollie told me about. If it is suitable for the needs of our parents, I will see them installed in a home

of their own before another week passes. Why, John, I'd rather murder our dear old father and mother in cold blood than leave them under the heel of that parsimonious —"

"Don't be too hard on Lije, Joe. He's had a whole lot to contend with since the sawmill, the debts, and other double loads have been left on his hands."

"And no wonder," was the significant rejoinder. "He deserves his fate."

The sun arose in splendor, warming the air, and making the drive of three or four miles keenly invigorating and enjoyable. They found the little farm they had come to inspect in fair condition, though in need of some modern improvements, of which the brothers took note. The land had originally belonged to the senior Ranger, who had secured a title to the half-section of which it was a part, directly from the government.

"If father had been content with smaller land holdings, it might have been better for him and all the rest of us," said John.

"There is danger that we may make the same mistake in Oregon," replied Joseph.

"What a wealthy man father might have been, though, if he had held on to all the land he acquired in this country in an early day!" added John.

"But he'd be a happier man to-day on this ten-acre plat, with prosperous small farmers all around him and all the improvements and conveniences on the plat that it can be made to carry, than he would be with a whole township on his shoulders under the burdens of taxation and a careless tenantry."

"I don't know but you are right," echoed John; "it is n't what we own, or imagine that we own, in this world, but what we can utilize, that makes up our real possessions. Oregon will surely suffer, in years to come, as a result of the present system of land-grabbing. Most of the unhappiness of the farmers' wives results from

isolation, which small farms would remedy. This little home is a perfect gem. Mother will be delighted."

"And the Robinson old folks will have congenial neighbors. I can shut my eyes and see father now, hobbling about the place with his cane, pulling a weed here and a flower there, tending the horse and cow and garden, planting his onions and potatoes in the dark of the moon, as of old, and his cabbage and peas and beans when it is full."

"And think how mother will enjoy her poultry and posies! But we must do something to relieve Lije of his burden of debt, or he'll drive Mollie to suicide."

"I feel under no obligation to Lije, God knows! But for Mollie's sake, I'll see about helping him out."

"Do you still intend to leave for the coast to-morrow?"

"No," said Joseph. "I spoke hastily. This is Sunday. We can't complete our business to-day. I will see the agent and settle about this little farm in the morning. After we get the old folks comfortable it will be time to consider Lije. He must wait."

"I've been thinking all day," said John, as they were journeying homeward, "that the entire running machinery of the home should be intrusted to women, who are the real home-makers. My Annie planned for the support of her parents, and made them modestly independent by a stroke of her pen. But she could not have done it if I had continued obstinate about signing the deed; and I am very much afraid I could not have been prevailed upon to do it if it had n't been for the persistence of Jean. She gave me no peace till the conveyance was made. If women possessed law-making power, these matters would in time be adjusted, and both men and women would be the gainers in the long run. But both men and women are as short-sighted as they are selfish. Solomon was right when he said: 'There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet,

but it tendeth to poverty.' It is noticeable that men of the frontier are more inclined to be just with their co-workers, the mothers, than the men of the older States."

"It's all settled, mother," exclaimed Joseph, as he alighted at the cottage doorstep and threw the reins to John; "I've been to see that little farm adjoining Pap Robinson's, and I've made terms. The little place is yours from now on, and I will not leave you till you are settled in it."

"Your father will be so happy, son! He started to meeting a little while ago. I stayed at home to have a nice, warm supper ready. It is n't many more meals I'll get a chance to cook for my boys."

"You did your share in that line long ago, mother dear."

In the family reunion in the little cottage home that night there were no intruders. John, Mary, and Joseph held sweet communion with their parents alone.

"Our Father in Heaven," prayed the old man, before retiring, "we thank Thee for all Thy tender mercies to us-ward. We realize Thy hand in our chastening; and we behold Thy love in our sorrows, since, but for them, we could not appreciate our joys. We thank Thee for John, for Mary, for Joseph, and for this night's reunion. We also thank Thee for our absent dear ones, and for those whose bodies are under the snow, whose spirits are with Thee.

"Animate us all with the Christ spirit, O God; and grant that in Thine own good time we all may meet again."

And the brothers echoed aloud the good father's "Amen."

XL

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

A YEAR has passed, and the autumn of 1853 has arrived. It has been a most strenuous twelve months on the Ranch of the Whispering Firs. Rapid changes, unlooked-for vicissitudes, improvements upon the virgin soil, annoying delays, and happy reunions have made the seasons fly.

The house was now surrounded by a cultivated field, through the centre of which a broad, tree-lined avenue wound upward from the grade below. The cattle whose labor had saved the lives of the immigrants the previous year were now sleek and fat.

Behind the dwelling rose the foot-hills of the Cascade Mountains, their sides and summits clothed with the majestic forest of pointed firs from which the ranch had derived its name. Still higher up, and yet up, above the serrated steeps, loomed hoary old Mount Hood, spreading his snowy robes over the misty lesser heights, the top of his white turban hidden among the clouds, his flowing beard resting upon the pointed crests of the most distant trees.

The music of machinery filled the air. The sawmill was at its best, running day and night to supply the ever-increasing demand for lumber. The original plant had already been greatly increased.

"It is a glorious thing to be alive!" said Jean, pausing in the perusal of a letter. "The air is as balmy as spring-time. What a blessed change it will be for Ashton, who has seen nothing but sagebrush, bald mountains, jack-rabbits, sage-hens, Indians, immigrants, and cacti the summer long! Oh, my darling, it is a whole year since our first meeting!

"My last day in the schoolroom is over. I have enjoyed my work. Many of the little tots are better for the training I have given them. But best of all is the improvement the experience has brought to me. Every good deed reacts upon the doer. Ashton will hardly realize the progress I have made in education, physical appearance, and culture during the vanished year"; and she smiled approvingly at her reflection in the little mirror. "And to think that to-morrow is our wedding-day!" She resumed the reading of her cherished missive.

"It will interest you to know that the fellow Hankins, whose villany came so near to wrecking our happiness, my beloved, has been sent to the Pen. at Salt Lake for forgery. What a splendid man he might have been if he had improved his opportunities! He still has a penitentiary term to serve in New York, which, added to his twenty years in Utah, will take him into the sere and yellow leaf."

"And I'd have allowed myself to marry that fellow, I fear, if you had proved false to me, my Ashton," exclaimed Jean, as she turned from her musings to survey her *trousseau*, upon which she and Mary had spent much time and skill.

"Are you at leisure, sister?" asked Mary.

"Of course I am always at leisure to see you, Mary. But what is the matter? You are as red as a rose and bright as a diamond!" and she fondled the sparkling gem upon her own finger lovingly.

"Something sweet and momentous has happened, my dear. Wish me joy! Mr. Buckingham and I are to make the fourth couple to join the matrimonial combination at the fateful hour to-morrow."

"Is n't this rather sudden, Mame? Won't you be leaving Marjorie in the lurch at the cook-house? And, above all, what will you do for a *trousseau*?"

"No, dear, this change is not sudden. As you know, we have been engaged for over six months. But my

fiancé, being under orders from the government, has not been certain of a permanency before. We will take Marjorie with us to Washington, and keep her in school. And now as to *trousseau*. My white dimity dress is fresh and new, and so is Marjorie's. When we get to Washington, where Mr. Buckingham must spend the winter under orders from the Land Department, he says we can patronize the *modiste* to our heart's content. It was a fortunate day for me when my husband that is to be was sent out to Oregon to investigate alleged land frauds; and more fortunate still that he discovered that fellow Hankins."

"I wish we'd known this a week ago, Mame. You might have had an ivory-white, all-wool delaine, with lace and satin trimmings, just like mine."

"My little sister, notwithstanding her reputation for strong-mindedness, is a charming bit of femininity, after all," laughed Mary, as she hurried away.

The near approach of a creaking wagon caused the sisters to approach the window.

"As I live!" cried Jean, "it's the Reverend Thomas Rogers coming up the grade. And that is his little doll-faced wife. Wonder where they came from, and what in creation they're coming here for."

"You must go out to meet them, Jean," said Mary. "I never want to see them again; but we mustn't be remiss in hospitality."

"He looks as if the world had gone hard with him, poor fellow," laughed Jean. "Don't you wish you had to pull in double harness with the like of him for the rest of your life?"

"I would never have fancied him in the first place if I had had any sense," said Mary. "Wonder who paid their bills," she cried with a hysterical little laugh, as she watched the preacher's wife while she alighted over the wagon-wheel without any attention or assistance.

"Yonder goes Mrs. O'Dowd to the rescue. Do you know, Mame, I think it is a wise step for daddie to hitch up with Sally O'Dowd? He might go farther and fare a whole lot worse."

Although the greeting the Rogers family received from the Ranger household was not exactly in keeping with the open-hearted hospitality of the border, it seemed to satisfy the preacher, who made himself as agreeable as possible.

"I went, Squire, to see your parents and Mrs. Ranger's a few days before I left the States," said the preacher. "The dear old people were well and prosperous and contented. They have imbibed a new theory about time and distance. They talk learnedly about vibrations, a fourth dimension in space, and other such nonsense; and they declare that there can be no real separation of souls that are in perfect accord with one another. Their new belief is making them as happy as birds. I would have no objection to such speculations if they did n't tend to undermine the gospel. All such theories detract from the faith of our fathers."

"Not necessarily," said Jean. "I think that we ought always to accept truth for authority; but you want everybody to accept authority for truth."

"I see it is the same little 'doubting Thomas' we used to have in the Pleasant Prairie schoolhouse," said the minister.

"There is a whole lot of common-sense in Jean's religion," cried Hal; "I mean to accept her manufacture of the article as straight goods, full measure and a yard wide."

"These discussions are not profitable," said Captain Ranger, dryly.

"Your father and mother are certainly very happy in their theories; I can say that much for them," said Mrs. Rogers, who, from her nook in the corner, had seldom ventured a word. "Their cottage was as neat as a new

pin. It was the springtime, and climbing roses were clamoring over the little porch. The old people seemed to lack for nothing but the companionship of their children." And the little woman, amazed at her own loquacity, shrank back abashed.

"God has been very kind and gracious to both of the good old couples," said the preacher, in a sonorous voice.

"Some people have an unlimited supply of gall," said Hal, aside to Mary, alluding to the preacher and his wife.

"I don't see but they are all right," was the smiling reply of the rosy-cheeked maiden. "They have placed me under everlasting obligations, I do assure you." She arose to greet a handsome visitor, whom she proudly introduced to them as "my affianced husband."

The preacher's joy was unbounded when Captain Ranger invited him to perform a quadruple marriage ceremony on the morrow, — an incident he hailed as an augury of the further social and financial assistance of which he felt so much in need that he began at once to solicit aid for the erection of a church and parsonage.

"For heaven's sake, don't begin to bother us about this innovation for a week or two!" exclaimed the Captain. "I'll see that you are fed and housed for the present. As Jean will be leaving us, we shall need a school-teacher. My wife will not want an outsider to use our house for the school; so we must make a school-house and meeting-house combined, and let it suffice for the present."

The morning brought a scene of hurry, bustle, and happiness. Long tables were spread upon the lawn, under the wide-spread branches of the luxuriant fir-tree the woodman had spared when the land was cleared. Flowers and ferns from the wildwood added glow and fragrance to the loaded tables. Mary and Jean, rosy with expectation, flitted everywhere.

"Did you ever in all your born days see such a wonderful man as my daddie?" asked Jean, addressing Sally O'Dowd; and the happy woman answered, "I never did."

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Ranger, the latter resplendent in a satin gown of latest fashion, were conspicuous assistants; and their children, all of whom were gotten up for the occasion by their happy mother regardless of expense, were the observed of all observers. These children, added to the younger members of Captain Ranger's brood, the three children of Mrs. O'Dowd, and Susannah's "coon," made a formidable array of young Americans.

At the appointed hour, Mrs. McAlpin, who had arrived early on horseback to assist in the preparations, was joined by Mr. Burns, who brought to her a sealed package, long overdue, concerning which they kept their own counsel. But in anticipation of its arrival, they had allowed a "personal" to appear in the local paper in due season, as follows: "Mrs. Adele Benson, the handsome widow who spent a few days in this city after crossing the plains last year, and whose widowed daughter, Mrs. Daphne McAlpin, is soon to be the bride of our distinguished fellow-citizen, Mr. Rollin Burns, recently astonished her friends in Oregon with the announcement of her marriage in London to the Right Honorable Donald McPherson, only son and heir of Lady Mary McPherson, whose extensive estates are the pride and envy of High-Head on the Thames."

The appointed hour had come, and the four brides expectant were beaming and beautiful in their simple and becoming array. Mr. Burns and Mr. Buckingham awaited the signal to descend with their brides. But where was Ashton Ashleigh?

Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, and he did not come. The dinner was spoiling, and Susannah was furious.

"I allus 'lowed dah'd nothin' come o' dat co'tship!" she said to Hal.

"Go ahead and get the ceremonies over," said Jean. "Don't allow this interruption to mar the enjoyment of anybody."

And while her father was leading Mrs. O'Dowd to the marriage altar, with Mr. Burns and Mrs. McAlpin following, and Mary and her chosen one bringing up the rear, she sank, white-faced and benumbed upon her bed, and gave no sign of life except in the nervous fluttering of her half-closed eyelids.

For a long time she lay thus, mercifully bereft of the power to suffer. "There is some unavoidable reason for this delay," she said over and over to herself. "I'll understand it all in time."

The afternoon waned, and darkness fell upon the Ranch of the Whispering Firs.

"Jean!"

"Is that you, daddie dear?"

"Yes, darling."

"What do you think has delayed Ashton?"

"Try to forget him, Jean. His failure to be on hand at his own marriage ought to prove to you that he is faithless. You will live to thank God that the knowledge of Ashton's faithlessness did not come upon you after marriage."

"Ashton is not faithless!" she cried, springing to her feet. Then she fell quivering to the floor.

"Run, quick, Hal! Saddle a horse and go for the Little Doctor," cried Mary.

A heavy mist that had rolled up from the ocean in the afternoon had settled now into a steady downpour. There was no moon, and the dense darkness of the forest through which Hal's road lay was as black as Erebus. "Jean loves you, Sukie," he would say, patting the mare on the shoulder. "We must get the Little Doctor at all

hazards"; and the mare, as if sensing the importance of her mission, would leap forward with a sympathetic whinny.

The door was opened by Mr. Burns, revealing a scene of domestic comfort.

A little table, covered with a snowy cloth and spread with light refreshments, stood before a blazing fire; and at its head sat Mrs. Burns, daintily attired in a light blue wrapper of exquisite workmanship.

"Why, Harry Ranger!" she exclaimed, as the lad stood inside the door, shaking his dripping garments. "I hope Jean is n't worse? I left her calm and seemingly out of danger."

"She's fallen in a fit! I've come for the Doctor!"

The wind had lulled a little as the little party hurried down the muddy highway toward the Ranch of the Whispering Firs. The Little Doctor, nattily arrayed in a rain suit, hood and all, sat her horse securely and plunged headlong through the darkness, while Hal rode by her side, followed at a distance by her husband, who bumped up and down in Scotch-English fashion on a heavy trotter, reminding himself of John Gilpin, as his hat blew off and his stirrup slipped from his foot.

"I've heard rumors of the 'coming woman' many a time," he thought, bracing himself by clinging to the horn of his Spanish saddle. "But the deuce take me if I like the article in practice, though I've long advocated her cause in theory."

He said as much in an injured tone to his wife, as they alighted at the Ranger home, and received for answer, "We must always consider what is the greatest good for the greatest number, dear. Won't we be well repaid for this night's adventure if Jean is saved?"

The Little Doctor found her patient in a rigid, trance-like state, her eyelids fluttering and her breathing stertorous.

"The heart's action is fairly good," she said, after a

careful examination. "The most we can do is to keep her quiet. I will administer an opiate, and I think nature will do the rest. Meanwhile, somebody must go after that recalcitrant bridegroom. She would soon recover her tone if she could lose faith in him altogether. It is suspense that kills."

"Brother Joseph started across the Cascade Mountains after him early in the afternoon," the Captain explained. "He declared that nothing but foul play or some unavoidable accident could have detained so ardent a suitor."

At the hour of midnight, when the Ranch of the Whispering Firs was wrapped in silence, Jean awoke, dismissed Susannah, and rose from her bed.

"O my God," she cried inwardly, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from both of us! I know, O Spirit of Good, that my own has not, of his own accord, deserted his counterpart, his other self. Give me strength equal to my day! Let me not fail him now, when I know he needs me most."

"I must have been in your presence, Ashton, while my body was asleep," she said half audibly. "For, in spite of my seeming duty to be miserable, I cannot be unhappy or hopeless. I seem to have been on a journey; but my recollection of it is indistinct and disjointed."

She went to the window and looked out into the night. The clouds had rolled away, the wind had ceased, and the silent stars were looking down.

XLI

"IN PRISON AND YE VISITED ME"

JOSEPH RANGER left the scene of the triple wedding early in the afternoon in quest of the missing bridegroom, and was overtaken by the storm before riding a dozen miles. But the hospitable welcome of the pioneers awaited him at Foster's; and a substantial breakfast was ready for him before the dawn. The sun was barely up before he left the valley and entered the mountain pass. His faithful horse, who seemed to understand that he was bound on no ordinary errand, carefully chose his steps among the rocks and gullies, and bore him onward with gratifying speed.

Night overtook him long before he had descended the last of the rugged steepes that crossed his path after passing the summit of the range.

Bands of elk and antelope crossed his track at intervals; and at night, when he stopped to camp under a great pine-tree, when his fire was built, and his faithful horse and himself had feasted together upon the bag of roasted wheat he had brought along for sustenance, a band of deer, kindly eyed, graceful, and not afraid, came near him, attracted by the blaze and smoke, and circled around his bed at a respectful distance long after he had retired among his blankets upon a couch of evergreen boughs.

"That's right! Come close, my beauties!" he exclaimed, as a doe and her daughter came close enough to breathe in his face. "I would n't shoot one of you for the world. Your confidence is not misplaced." But when he put out his hand to fondle them, they bounded away as light as birds, only to approach again and paw the blankets with their nimble hoofs, and awaken him from his coveted sleep. Finally, to frighten them away,

he fired his revolver into the air, and the entire herd scampered away into the darkness.

"The gun is the wild animal's master," he said as he fell asleep, to be awakened again by the neighing of his tethered horse.

The fire of pitch-pine was still burning, and a pair of eyes glowed near his face like coals.

"This is no deer," he thought, as he very cautiously clasped his "pepper-box" repeater.

A heavy paw was placed upon his breast, and the hot breath of a bear came close enough to nauseate him. There was no time to lose. As a mountaineer, he knew the nature of his foe too well to await the inevitable embrace of Bruin. Little by little he moved his repeater, and, when the weight of the animal was wellnigh crushing him, he sent a bullet through his eye. But the danger was by no means past, as the beast, though wounded unto death, was yet alive, and furious with rage and pain.

Just how he extricated himself from the peril of that eventful encounter, Joseph Ranger never knew, but he lived to narrate the adventure to children and grandchildren, and preserved to his dying day that long-outdated "pepper-box" revolver with which his great-grandchildren now delight to fire a volley in his honor on Washington's Birthday and the Fourth of July.

Once safely through the Cascade Mountains, Joseph found little to impede his progress. Some friendly Indians were encountered at the base of the Blue Mountains, who gave him a hearty meal of bear-meat and wapatoes, and supplied his weary horse with hay and oats.

"Mika closh cumtux Wahneta. Heap good Injun squaw! Ugh! Wake Mika potlatch chickimin! Hyas closh muck-a-muck! Heap good. Cultus potlatch!" was the way in which his Indian host expressed his hospitality and refused compensation. And Joseph Ranger,

acquainted with the jargon of many native tribes, further ingratiated himself in the Indian's favor by presenting his squaw with a few gaudy trinkets such as an experienced borderer always carries when crossing an Indian country.

On and on he hurried toward the valley of Great Salt Lake, impelled by an irresistible impulse he could not have explained to any one. The weather was in his favor in crossing the Blue Mountains, though the air was cold, and the wind sometimes blew furiously. Water was low in all the smaller streams, and the beds of many of them were dry. Ice formed at night in swampy places and thawed by day, making travelling slippery and tedious; but on and on he hurried, knowing time was precious and yet not clearly understanding why.

At the Ogden Gateway he gained some information that doubled his impatience and quickened his speed. A man was being held on a charge of murder at Salt Lake City who he instinctively felt was Ashleigh. His informant, a Spanish half-breed, did not know his name, but he said an Indian girl was the victim, and her name was Le-Le.

On and on he journeyed, till he reached the verge of the little border city of Salt Lake. The Mormon Temple was not yet built, but a tabernacle had already arisen as its herald; and the Bee Hive House and Lion House were filled with wives and children of the prophet, who regularly toiled and spun. Joseph hastened to the adobe jail, where, after a brief delay, which seemed to him like an age, he was conducted to a dingy little cell, reserved for criminals of the lowest type.

A tall man, unshaven and in his shirt-sleeves, was pacing back and forth in his narrow quarters like a caged animal. He paused as the bolt flew back; and, as the light fell upon the face of his astonished visitor, he exclaimed, "Good God! Joseph Addicks! Can this be you?"

"I am Joseph Ranger, my boy! And I have come here all the way from the farthest West. But sit down here on the edge of your bed, and tell me all about it."

"You remember the Indian maiden, Le-Le, whom I purchased and ransomed?"

"Yes."

"And you recall the fact that I left her with her brother, Siwash, at my Green River cave at the time I came to you?"

"I remember that you said so."

"Can you recall the date of my visit to you at the trading-post?"

"No; but there must be memoranda somewhere that will settle that. Why?"

"Because nothing will save me, Joseph, from the hangman's rope unless I can prove an alibi. I forwarded a letter to you at Oregon City—or tried to—after this mishap befell me; but a courier can be bribed sometimes, you know, and Henry Hankins, who failed to capture my bride, is bent upon revenge. His incarceration does n't keep him out of reach of pals. But how is my bonnie Jean?"

"I left home too hurriedly to get much information. But her father said she was strangely calm, and full of faith in you."

"Then my darling is not ill?"

"I certainly did not leave her well, Ashleigh, but she is in good hands. Do you know the particulars of Le-Le's death?"

"I only know that her body was found in an eddy in Green River about a fortnight after I last saw her. Just as I was on the eve of starting to Oregon to claim my bride, I was arrested, charged with murder, and brought to this villanous den."

"Be of good cheer, Ashleigh; I will find Siwash. Say nothing to any one. The darkest hour of the night is just before the morning. Good-bye, and may God bless you!"

XLII

TOO BUSY TO BE MISERABLE

JEAN met her father and his wife at the breakfast-table with a welcoming smile, though her head ached, and on her countenance there was a deathly pallor.

"The last night's storm played havoc with the cherished plans of Mr. and Mrs. Burns," said Mary's husband, adroitly turning the conversation into a diverting channel. "They were intending to spend their honeymoon with their camping outfit in the open air among the spicy odors of the October woods."

"They are old enough, and ought to be wise enough, by this time, to spend their honeymoon at home. No bridegroom ever dreamed of taking his bride away from home during the honeymoon in my younger days; that is, nobody did with whom my lot was cast," said Captain Ranger, beaming tenderly upon his wife, who, being a sensible woman, was not displeased to note the far-away look in his eyes which betrayed his straying thoughts.

"You need n't make any plans for a new teacher, for the present at least, daddie," said Jean; "I shall resume my duties in the schoolroom next week. Will you post the required notices for me at the Four Corners, and at the sawmill, sometime during the day?"

"I would n't be in a hurry about teaching, daughter. Your Uncle Joseph has gone by private pony express in quest —"

He paused, uncertain as to the propriety of speaking the name that was uppermost in all their thoughts.

"I know it, daddie. I knew all that was going on when I lay yesterday in what seemed to you as a stupor. I can't explain it, but I seemed to have a double, or second, self that told me everything. Ashton is in trouble,

but he is not in bodily danger, and he will not die. I do not understand it clearly, for I saw conditions only as through a glass, darkly. I would have remained in that state of seeming torpor for a whole month if it had been possible, for my mind and body were in different places. But in spite of myself I am again in a normal condition."

"I shall be able to devote two weeks' work to the erection of that combined schoolhouse and meeting-house," said Mary's husband. "Can't you wait, sister, to begin your school till then?"

"No, Mr. Buckingham. You are very kind, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart, but I cannot wait. There will be time enough for you to take the reins when I am gone, Mr. Rogers."

During the remainder of the week she performed prodigies of labor, but the work lagged at the mess-house. The new cook was not a success, and there was much dissatisfaction among the workingmen. But the Chinaman learned his lessons rapidly under the guidance of the Ranger sisters, and was soon able to load the long tables with plain but savory food.

The storm left the face of Nature fresh and green and joyous, and Mr. Burns and the Little Doctor repaired to the woods and foot-hills for their honeymoon, after all.

Jean's complexion grew more delicately beautiful, her form more and more symmetrical, and her eyes sparkled like stars. But her girlish exuberance of spirit was gone, and in its place had come a womanly dignity, commanding, gracious, and sweet. The departure of Mary and her husband, with Marjorie, added heavily to Jean's duties as superintendent of the Sunday-school. But her spirit craved work; so she opened a singing-school and a metrical geography class.

"Still no tidings!" she cried to herself, after an unusually strenuous day. "But I will not despair, and I will do my duty though the heavens fall. The whole of this month's salary goes to Grandpa and Grandma Ranger.

And for this opportunity to show my appreciation of their lives of self-denial in the service of others, I devoutly thank God."

A shadow darkened the door of the deserted school-room.

"Who is it? And what is wanted?" asked Jean, with a start.

"It is I,—the Reverend Thomas Rogers," said a voice, as, stepping out of the shadow, the preacher met her face to face.

"I have just completed my day's work, and was about to shut up shop," she said, moving toward the door.

"Very well. I will walk homeward with you, if I may."

"No, you won't!" piped a tremulous, complaining voice; and Mrs. Rogers stepped between them and the doorsill.

"I came to see Miss Jean about a change in the management of the Sunday-school," said the preacher, meekly.

"And I've come to remind you that you must chop some stove-wood and milk the cow."

The voice was not tremulous now, but commanding. "I'll teach you to be running after the schoolma'am at unseemly hours!" she said with a vehemence that startled Jean, who had thought her the personification of submission and humility. "And I'll teach you to be courting my husband, Miss Jean!"

"You can divest yourself of all anxiety on that score, Mrs. Rogers. I never saw the time when I would have dreamed of 'courting' the Reverend Thomas Rogers, even before he was married; and I would n't 'court' any woman's husband."

"To be explicit," said the preacher, in a submissive tone, "I think it is high time for the pastor of this church to manage his Sunday-school. Miss Jean's methods are not strictly orthodox. I did n't mean to speak of this to

her in the presence of any third person, but since you have come upon the scene, Mrs. Rogers, we may as well settle it here and now."

"What's the trouble?" asked Jean, laughing irreverently.

"The hymns she teaches the children are not solemn enough. They are all about happy days and care-free birds and joyous children, whose chief duty lies in obeying their parents and loving one another. I've looked on during the proceedings, carefully and anxiously, for four consecutive Sundays now, and I have n't heard one word about eternal punishment, nor has she exhorted anybody to flee from the wrath to come!"

"Are n't you ashamed of your fit of jealousy in the light of this revelation, Mrs. Rogers?" asked Jean, laughing aloud.

"I know he was once in love with your sister Mary!" was the evasive but crestfallen reply.

"Well, Mr. Rogers," said Jean, closing and locking the door, "we may as well be ending this interview. I founded the Sunday-school, and I will not abdicate till I get ready to leave the country. I never could be made to believe by your preaching or teaching that God was n't as good as my daddie, or even yourself. I am teaching the children to love and serve a beneficent God, and to love their neighbors as themselves. If that is heresy, make the most of it. Good-night! And, Mrs. Rogers, the next time you feel the unseemly pangs of jealousy, don't make a fool of yourself before folks."

XLIII

JEAN IS HAPPY — AND ANOTHER PERSON

D ECEMBER, gloomiest month in the year, had settled over the Ranch of the Whispering Firs. The steady mist of the rainy season was at its best, or worst, according to the point of view, mental and physical, of its beholder. The mighty colónnades of trees, that reared their pointed crests in the mist-enwrapped heavens, were busily engaged, at the foot of the Cascade Mountains, in storing away the moisture of the skies among the countless layers of vegetable mould and moss from which to draw their supplies for the next summer's drouth.

The sawmill, planing-mill, and shingle-loom were running day and night. The skid roads, upon which the leviathans of the forest were dragged to their final doom, were sodden, slippery, and already badly worn. Relays of oxen tugged at the creaking chains and complaining logs. The mill-pond, a lake upon the mountain-side, very much enlarged by a dam, lay half asleep under a soft coating of ice; and higher up, at the snow line, lay the ice-clad creek that fed it, sheathed in a coat of mail which held in check the waters that were destined, when a thaw should come, to overflow their banks and send a flood into the valley below.

"Are you an angel from heaven, or are you Ashton Ashleigh?" cried Jean, as a tall man entered at the open door and stood before her with outstretched arms. The color faded from her cheeks, and her heart gave a violent thump and then stood still.

"Nothing angelic about me or near me this holy minute, unless it is Jean, my bonnie Jean!" exclaimed

the intruder, as he clasped her tenderly in his arms. Jean was speechless for the moment with surprise and joy.

"Why don't you ask for an explanation, little one?" he asked after an interval. "An explanation is due you, God knows!"

"I knew you would come," she whispered timidly. "You have been forcibly detained, Ashton. Nothing else would, or could, have kept you away from your own."

"Yes, darling; it was all the evil-doing of that man Hankins, to whom I intrusted my letter and my ring. Come in, Uncle Joseph. Tell the whole cruel story."

"He was on his way to his wedding when he was arrested and thrown into prison!" exclaimed the uncle.

"You remember the slave girl Le-Le, my bonnie Jean? I was falsely accused of being her murderer; and they would surely have convicted me of the crime if your uncle had not appeared upon the scene, and after much delay and difficulty proved an alibi. Do you wonder that my hair has turned white?"

"Why, so it has, Ashton! I had not noticed it before; the light is dim. But you are all right. Your hair is beautiful. I like it best as it is."

"I had a deuce of a time proving that alibi!" interrupted the uncle. "Our only witness was Siwash, who had left the scene of the tragedy and was nowhere to be found, though I sent scouts out for him in every direction. He had no idea that he was wanted, when he finally appeared upon the scene, but he came just in the nick of time.

"'I saw my sister make the fatal leap into Green River,'" he deposed in excellent English. "She had been very despondent after Mr. Ashleigh left us, and I was often afraid she would take her life. But as the weeks passed, she apparently grew more reconciled; and I had ceased to worry about her, when one day, after getting my luncheon, she refused to wait upon the table, and left our cave in a manner that excited my alarm. So

I followed her. I saw the fatal leap. She plunged into the rushing water through a hole in the ice, under which her body was imprisoned till last summer, when it was found three miles from the fatal scene. I never dreamed of anybody being accused of killing her, — least of all Mr. Ashleigh, our benefactor and friend.'

" 'Do the citizens of the village near the scene of the tragedy know of the suicide?' asked the Court.

" 'They do, your Honor, a dozen of them!' said the boy.

"No argument was offered on either side. Hankins was sent back to the penitentiary. Ashton was allowed to go forth a free man; and here, after a hard journey, are both of us to tell the tale!"

Sunday morning at the Ranch of the Whispering Firs. The skies, which have been humid and lowering for many days, are once more on their good behavior. The clouds have rolled away to the Northland, and the air and sunshine are as balmy as in springtime.

Once more there is a gathering, — this time at the combined schoolhouse and meeting-house; and Jean Ranger, handsomely attired in a well-made travelling suit of gray, with hat to match, — the handiwork of her stepmother and the Little Doctor, — is superintending for the last time (at least the last till after her return from abroad) her beloved Sunday-school. The tidings of the bridegroom's arrival had spread from house to house, and everybody within a radius of a dozen miles had appeared upon the scene. The children of the district had decorated the room profusely with wild flowers, ferns, and evergreens.

Jean, in surrendering her school to the pastor, made a felicitous speech, exhorting her pupils to continue in the ways of well-doing. Then, bidding them a loving and hopeful good-bye, she formally resigned her post, and the Reverend Thomas Rogers assumed control.

At a given signal from Captain Ranger, a tall and handsome young Englishman, whose youthful face contrasted strangely with his snowy hair, stepped proudly down the aisle, where he was joined by his radiant bride, leaning on the arm of her father; and the preacher pronounced the words that legalized a union made in heaven. The tears that rose unbidden to the eyes of bronzed and bearded men and toilworn, plainly attired women were tears of joy and peace, good-will and gladness.

A bountiful basket-dinner, contributed, as by a common impulse, from the home of almost every family in the district, was served within the building.

"We leave to-morrow, by steamer from Portland, going by way of San Francisco, Acapulco, and the Isthmus, up the Atlantic coast to New York," said the happy bridegroom, in his post-prandial speech, "whence we shall sail for Liverpool. I shall take my wife to London to visit my mother. Then, on our return to Oregon (for we will make this neighborhood of the Ranch of the Whispering Firs our permanent home), we shall stop over at Washington to see her sisters,—Mrs. Buckingham and Marjorie; and after that we can visit the home of her childhood."

"But I prefer going first to the home of my grandparents, dearest," said the bride. "We can get there easily by the way of the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River and the Illinois, if we'll be on hand before the rivers are frozen over. We can then go on to Washington, and to England afterwards. Don't you think this will be the more economical, convenient, and reasonable plan?"

"As this journey is to be in your honor, it shall be as you say, my bonnie Jean."

The bride blushed and beamed bewitchingly, while the crowd laughed and applauded, and her husband bowed and smiled in approval.

All eyes then turned upon the father, who took the

happy and exultant bridegroom by the hand and said in a voice tremulous with emotion: "Ashton Ashleigh, my son through marriage, you have taken to yourself the priceless jewel that I once fondly thought was mine! Value not lightly the radiant gem of womanhood you guard!" Then to the bride he said, embracing her tenderly, while the eyes of the multitude filled afresh with tears: "Beloved daughter of thy sainted mother, go thy way with the husband of thy choice. But do not forget to hold thyself always as his equal before God and man. Then shalt thou be his best counsellor, his real helpmate, and his wisest friend." To both he added, as he folded their clasped hands between his own broad palms: "Keep step together, my children; and, whether your way shall lead you up the mountain-sides of difficulty, or through the quagmires of sorrow, or into the glad valleys of happiness and peace, always march side by side, in time and tune to the eternal harmonies of religion, liberty, equality, justice, and progression."

And here, patient reader, with Life before them, and Love leading the way, these chronicles shall bid adieu to the happy pair while they take temporary leave of the remnant of the Ranger household and the Ranch of the Whispering Firs.

THE END

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